# TREE-WORSHIP AND OPHIOLATRY

BY

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# FOREWORD

Vidyaratna, Tatvasastraratna
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HAVING undertaken to write a Foreword to this excellent piece of research by my esteemed friend and colleague, Vidvan, G. Subramania Pillai, M.A., B.L., I plead in justification only my great interest in the study of the evolution of religious beliefs and practices prevalent in this country. Mr. G. Subramania Pillai has covered new ground and done pioneering work in collecting together and presenting in a succinct manner all available references to tree worship found scattered in the entire range of Tamil literature and seeking to gain an insight into the inner significance of the manifold rites and ceremonies that have grown round the tree and the serpent. There are very few parallels to these in the religious modes of other lands, though the worship of the tree is not peculiar to this country. The tree, we are told, was worshipped in Tamilnad, not as a deity in itself, but as the abode of gods and spirits.

Of special interest is the author's novel and original theory which discountenances the idea that the Sivalinga is a phallic symbol and seeks to trace the Sivalinga to its origin in the worship of Kanthu, the stump of the tree. On the withering away of the stump, Kanthaḷi, a stone, was to be installed in its place and worshipped. This stone substitute for the stump gradually became the Sivalinga. I commend to the reader the author's

original interpretation of the Tamil term 'Kanthali' with all its etymological import. It is so simple and direct that it appeals to reason.

The significance of the notion of Kāval-maram, that is, of trees which it was the duty of monarchs to foster and protect and which the invader invariably sought to destroy, is explained. An interesting theory to explain the enormous importance once attributed to the vēngai tree in the Tamil land is advanced. The flowering of the tree is the season for harvesting and for marriages and other festive functions.

Much pains-taking research has gone into this work. A study of this work will throw more light on the life of the ancient Tamils. It is highly provocative of thought and suggestive, opening new vistas for further research and investigation. Students of comparative religion and workers in the field of Tamil literature, I am sure, will not fail to make the best use of this work. In fine, I congratulate the author for this original and excellent piece of research and I highly commend it to the readers. I hope also that this will be followed by many more works of this kind, revealing the glory of the culture and civilisation of the ancient race of the Tamils.

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# TREE-WORSHIP, ITS BELIEFS & OPHIOLATRY
## IN THE TAMIL LAND

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**Tree-worship Universal**

From a study of the great works of Sir John Lubbock, Mr. Tylor, Mr. Fergusson and Mr. Monier Williams and other savants in the field, one cannot but arrive at the irresistible conclusion that the adoration of trees and plants, in virtue of the supernatural qualities or divine essence supposed to be inherent in them, is almost universally diffused over the globe and that this form of religion is of the greatest antiquity. Tree-worship was once common in Greece, France, Poland, Assyria and many other countries. It has continued to prevail among the aboriginal tribes in Africa, America and Polynesia. The continent of Asia has been notorious for her belief in a kind of divinity inherent in certain trees; and trees whereon offerings of curious objects and garments are found, are a familiar sight there for any globetrotter. The Tamil country is not an exception to this.

Man first worshipped trees as gods themselves. He believed that the tree had a soul of its own. Later on, as time advanced, the idea dawned on him that trees might become the receptacle of the spirits of gods and that they were peculiarly liable to be occupied by ghosts and goblins. The spirits might resort to them as guests or take up their abode in them as tenants, since trees furnished a convenient and agreeable shelter for

them. The stage of viewing a tree, no longer as the body of the tree-spirit but merely as its abode, marks an important advance made by man in religious thought. Here we see religion passing from animism into polytheism. The tree ceases to be a living and conscious being and becomes a lifeless inert mass possessed by a supernatural being. These supernatural beings in turn become the forest gods or Sylvan deities, assuming human shape and their wood-land character denoted by a branch, a leaf or a flower. These gods can disengage themselves from trees or permanently desert them. They were also likely to flit from tree to tree.

An account of the mystic and superstitious ideas of the past not only gives substance and foundation to our contemporary religious thought but also gives us an understanding of contemporary culture and civilization as a whole, for the ideas of the past are determining factors in the institutions, attitudes, customs, relations, groupings and other social forms and situations of the present. It has been rightly said that in any era men are the heirs of the past. The Tamils will rediscover the tradition of their glorious past and their energy to work towards the attainment of their fullness of life, culture, civilization and unity only by a study of the ancient literature of their yore.

Tree-worship Pre-Aryan

Extensive researches pursued after the excavations made at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, have firmly established this fact that the Tamil race was occupying the whole of India, from the Himalayas down to Cape Comorin in pre-Aryan days. Sir John

Marshal has observed that tree-worship was essentially a characteristic of the pre-Aryan, not of the Aryan population, and so the tree spirit has loomed far more important in pre-historic days among the peoples who originated this worship than it did later in an Aryanised India where tree-worship inevitably became subordinated to other cults alien or semi-alien.

The worship of trees is traceable even far into the chalcolithic age and we hear of faint references being made to it in the days of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Many seals have been discovered in the Indus Valley in which tree-gods and tree-goddesses have been engraved with supplicating figures in front of them. In one seal a pipal tree is represented by two branches and in between the two the indwelling deity appears in a nude form, with flowing tresses, triple horns and armlets. In front of the tree a half-kneeling suppliant is discovered. There are also seven small standing figures with a long plait of hair rolling down the nape of the neck and a plume on the head. They have been found to be the female officiants or ministrants of the goddess. In this manner there are various representations of sacred trees in several seals with minute differentiations carefully made by the artists, So, this establishes the fact that the worship of trees was pre-Aryan, indigenous and very ancient.

In the religious history of the Tamil race in India, the worship of trees has played an important part. Nothing could be more natural. Down to the first century before the Christian era the Tamil

country was thickly covered with virgin forests, stretching for a distance at once vast and unknown. The Chōḻa king, Karikāla, is said to have cleared jungles and made them habitable. (Paṭṭiṉap-pālai–283). So, for the ancients, the oldest sanctuaries were natural woods. They worshipped trees and groves. Sacred groves were fostered and protected by kings. These groves were called kaḍikā and the trees in these guarded sacred groves were known as kāvan-maram, meaning the favourite trees of a royal dynasty, as the object of special care by its kings. These trees were cherished as the sacred seat of a protecting divinity. This tree-worship is hardly extinct at the present day. It has always been a recognised element of the popular creed.

Trees, as Temples

Pliny asserts that the earliest form of temple or church was a tree. Later day research has shown that the South Indian temple also was of a later growth. Originally there were no temples built for gods. The ancients saw the divine grace of God enshrined and merged as it were, in the verdure of the sylvan paradise, the natural beauty of which touched the tender chord in their hearts. The tall thick trees spreading their branches into flowery bowers, yielding ambrosial fruits of vegetable gold in bunches, moving with the Zephyr which played with the honeyed flowers, wafting sweet fragrance all around, enthralled the minds of the ancients who easily perceived the divine presence of the Almighty amidst this wealth of Nature. Huge shady trees were supposed to be the abode of some unseen god and as such the

tree was regarded as sacred. The various gods and spirits whom the indigenous population of the peninsula worshipped, were first housed under the shade of some tree or other. The tree was the only known house for the primitive man. It was the tree that sheltered him from sun and rain. So man gave his first house to his God as well. To begin with, no object was placed under the tree to represent the deity, for the tree itself was regarded as a huge natural temple in which the spirit dwelt in suffusion. Later on, as time advanced, it was thought necessary to keep some image under the tree to evoke the reverence of all strangers and passers-by. This marks an important stage where we find the spirit being slowly detached from the tree. Thus, instead of identifying the tree with the spirit, the tree came more and more to be regarded as a mere sheltering place for the spirit. This is the intermediary stage and the final stage is reached when we find huge piles of buildings, of course, small to start with, replacing the trees. "Some of the great gods of the Hindu Pantheon exhibit traces of a forgotten past, when they seemed to have lived under trees."

**Holy trees of the temples**

When big temples were raised for gods who originally domiciled in the shade of trees, the Tamils took special care, as far as possible, not to remove those trees which were indeed preserved and worshipped with due awe and reverence. In fact these trees formed the centre around which the temples were built. An opening gap was made at the centre, leaving enough room for the trees to

grow. If any of these trees happened to die, its faded stems and withered branches were kept secure and worshipped. Those who have visited the temple of Thiruvaḷḷuvar at Mylapore could hardly have missed noting the huge stem of a dried iruppai tree (South Indian Mahua or Bassia longifolia) covered with a sheet of copper. In some temples new trees were planted in place of old ones and worshipped.

Any tree might have the fortune to become the temple of any of the big gods. The jack tree at Courtāllam, the mango tree at Māyavaram and Kāñchipuram, the bamboo at Thirunelvēli, the mast-wood or Punnai tree at Mylāpore, Thiruppugalūr and Thirupurambiam, the bottle-flower or kurā tree at Tiruviḍaikaḻi, the bael-tree or vilvam at Thiruvaikhā, the flower-murdah or marudham tree at Thiruviḍaimaruthūr, the jambu or black-plum tree at Thiruvāṉaikā, the trumpet-flower tree or pādiri at Thiruppāthirippuliyūr, the plantain tree at Thirumaruhal, the palmyra at Thiruppaṉanthāḷ, the jasmine creeper at Thirumullaivāyil and Thirukkarupparíyalūr, the Kaḍambu tree (common Kaḍamba) at Madura, the Makiḻam tree or minusaps elangi at Thiruvoṟṟiyūr and the Kāḷa tree (small lance—crenate—acute—leaved whortle-berry) at Karivalamvandanallūr are only a few of the many instances in point. The temples in the aforesaid places belong to Lord Siva. In the Viṣṇu temple of Āḻvārthirunagaṟi, in Thirunelvēli District, there is a huge Tamarind tree which is held sacred. This tree is worshipped as Thiruppuḷiāḻvār. It is belived to be the avatār of the serpent Ādisēṣa,

who in the form of this tree gave shelter to Saḍagōpa alias Nammāḻvār. The saint derived divine inspiration under the shade of this holy tree. This tree neither sleeps nor flowers. So it is also called the Uṟaṅgāpuḷi (sleepless Tamarind) (உறங்காப்புளி) Another Tamarind with these features was existing on a hill near Kānchipuram in Toṇḍainādu. This has been mentioned by Sēkkiḻār in Tirukuripputhoṇḍar Purāṇam as follows:—

" தானதொன்றினில் மூன்றுபூமலருந் தமனியச்செழுந்
தாமரைத்தடமும்
நீளவார்புனல் குடதிசைபோடி நீர்காக்குமா
நதியுடன் நீடு
காளவர்ந்தசெங் குவளைபைங்கமலம் கண்பகல்
கருப்பாடலம் அன்றிக்
காளமேகம் ஒப்பான்உறைவரைப்பில் கண்படாத
காயாப்புளி உளதால் "

Every big temple in South India has a holy tree of its own, pregnant with the significance of its hoary past, when there was no such temple and the God was pleased to rest in its shade. These trees are now called Sthalavriṭcha (the holy tree of the sacred place). Every such tree has a legend of its own. Some of them evince to this day some peculiar abnormal traits which can be interpreted as supernatural. One such instance we have seen in the sleepless Tamarind at Ālvārthirunagari. The mango tree at Kānchipuram yields fruits of different tastes at different sides. It may be construed as a freak of nature: but, any how, there is such a manifestation. Some temples have forgotten their venerable predecessors and no trees are known or preserved there.

In this connection, it is interesting to know something about the origin of Madura and its temple. The Thiruviḷaiyāḍalpurāṇam tells us that Indra, after killing Vridhrāsura, a giant, was caught by the curse of Brahmahatty and he was advised to go down to the earth to wash off his sins. There, when he passed through a wood of Kaḍamba trees, the Brahmahatty bid farewell to him and he became once again free and happy. Searching the woods to find out the cause for the happy change, he discovered God Siva in the form of a Lingam ensconced under the shade of a beautiful Kaḍamba tree. There he caused to be built a magnificent vimāna or turreted canopy and worshipped the deity. Thus was founded the Madura temple and the forest Kaḍambavana became the city of Madura. Though this may be treated as a myth, the idea underlying this legendary tale cannot be overlooked; and the idea confirms us in our view that gods were originally worshipped under trees and that cities were built by clearing jungles. Though a mighty temple has been created later for God Siva at Madura, the Kaḍamba tree is still preserved and revered as sacred. Thus almost every temple in South India has got its own story, tracing the original abode of the god there to a sacred tree.

**Kaḍambavana, Madura**

In the Sangam age every town and village in the Tamil country had a public place in a prominent part of the locality called Manḍṛam, Ambalam or Pothiyil. This manḍṛam was used for transacting all kinds of public functions, religious,

**The tree of the Manḍṛam**

social and political. It was at once a place of worship and a scene of amusement. The mandṛam was invariably shaded with trees, some of which were held as sacred. They were sacred because they were regarded as the divine abode of some god or spirit. Generally the deities were believed to dwell in the bulky stem of the lower part of the tree. Any kind of tree found in the mandṛam might happen to become the temple of any deity. Even a palmyra tree with a swelling lower stem, standing in a mandṛam was worshipped as the hoary residence of a long-famed god.

> " தொன்றுறை கடவுள் சேர்ந்த பராரை
> மன்றப் பெண்ணை " (Naṟṟiṇai 303)

The Banian Tree

In a small hamlet to which a narrow foot-path through a rocky terrain, covered with jasmine buds, led the way, there was a big banian tree with long overhanging aerial roots, which were often rubbed against by the grazing cattle. This banian tree was worshipped as the seat of a god to whom offerings were made at the foot of the tree. The crows preyed upon those scattered offerings and retired to their nests on the tree in the evening. This banian tree was standing in a public place, the mandṛam, which also served as a cattle-pen and was always a place of dust and bustle.

> " முல்லை தாய கல்லதர்ச் சிறுநெறி
> அடையா திருந்த வங்குடிச் சீறூர்த்
> தாதெரு மறுகின் ஆபுறந் தீண்டும்
> நெடுவீ ழிட்ட கடவு ளாலத்து
> உகுபலி யருந்திய தொகுவிரற் காக்கை
> புன்க ணந்திக் கிளைவயிற் செறிய."
>
> (Naṟṟiṇai-343)

As all kinds of religious worship took place and offerings scattered under the shade of trees, the birds, especially the crows, roosted on the branches, and were fed bountifully. At Kalār rice-balls and flesh were offered to the deities dwelling in trees and these were received by the awaiting crows :—

> " மாசின் மரத்த பலியுண் காக்கை
> வளிபொரு நெடுஞ்சினை தளியொடு தூங்கி
> வெல்போர்ச் சோழர் கழாஅர்க் கொள்ளு
> நல்வகை மிகுபலிக் கொடையோ டுகுக்கு
> மடங்காச் சொன்றி யம்பல் யாணர்
> விடக்குடைப் பெருஞ்சோ றுள்ளுவன விருப்ப."

(Naṟṟiṇai-281)

To propitiate the deity inhabiting the banian tree standing at a mandram, an elevated structure or altar was erected in front of the tree and sacrifices were offered on it. A deserted village is described in which a sacred banian tree with its altar was left neglected and its daily worship forgotten :—

> " சுரையிவர் பொதியி லங்குடிச் சீறூர்
> நாட்பலி மறந்த நரைக்க ணிட்டிகைப்
> புரிசை மூழ்கிய பொரியரை யாலத்து."

(Akanānūru-287)

The banian tree, with its never-failing boon of cool and pleasing shade to the worn and weary way-farers was always believed to have some divine force in itself, because some god or other would be pleased to take shelter in its shade. So the banian tree is always mentioned as being godly or possessed of some god.

"கடவுள் மரத்த" (Akanānūru-270)

"கடவு ளாலத்து"

(Puranānūru-199 and Narrinai-343)

Even in the Purāṇas, God Siva is visualised as sitting under a banian tree and expounding eternal truths to four disciples. Lord Vishnu or Tirumāl is pictured as an innocent babe, nestling on the leaf of a banian tree, floating on water. So these two gods are also called Ālamar Kaḍavuḷ.

"ஆலமர் கடவு ளன்னநின் செல்வம்."

(Puranānūru-198)

The commentator to Puranānūru, takes this epithet, 'Ālamar-kaḍavuḷ' as applying either to Siva or Tirumāl. So it is equally applicable to both. But this is very rare and generally Siva is considered to be the God of the Banian Tree and He is called Ālamar-Selvan.

"ஆலமர் செல்வன் அணிசால் மகன்விழா."

(Kalitogai-83)

"ஆலமர் செல்வன் புதல்வன்."

(Silappadikāram XXIV—Pāṭṭumaḍai)

"ஆலமர் செல்வன் பெயர்."

(Silappadikāram XXIII—144)

"ஆலமர் செல்வன் மகன் விழாக்கால் கோள்."

(Maṇimēkalai III—91)

Siva, seated under the banian tree, facing towards the south, is called Dakshiṇāmūrti, and this name is mentioned in Silappadikāram XXIII. In Kalitogai Siva, as Dakshiṇāmūrti, is said to be seated under the banian tree with a bowl of water.

" சீர்மிகு சிறப்பினோன் மரமுதற் கைசேர்த்த
நீர்மலி கரகம்போற் பழந்தூங்கு முடத்தாழை."
(Kalitogai-133)

[The fruit of the fragrant Screw-pine resembled the pitcher with a spout, placed by the side of the Far-famed Supreme (Siva) seated under the shade of the (Banian) tree.] At Pukār or Kāviripūmpaṭṭinam, there was a sacred tank on the bank of which a banian tree was standing, sheltering Siva, the Triple-eyed. The tank-bed shaded by this banian tree was known as Ālamuṟṟam where young maidens gathered early in the morning and beautified the spot with decorations. Then they worshipped Lord Siva and performed the ceremony of Pāvai-yāḍal or Ambāvāḍal.

" நான்மறை முதுநூன் முக்கட் செல்வன்
ஆல முற்றங் கவின்பெறத் தைஇய
பொய்கை சூழ்ந்த பொழின்மனை மகளிர்
கைசெய் பாவைத் துறைக்க ணிறுக்கு
மகர நெற்றி வான்றோய் புரிசைச்
சிகரந் தோன்றாச் சேணுயர் நல்லிற்
புகாஅர் நன்னாட் டதுவே. (Akanānūru—181)

In Thakkayāgaparaṇi, poet Oṭṭakūttar has, with his usual hyperbolical flourishes, described a banian tree that was standing in the temple of Kāḷi (Thakkayāgaparaṇi 139–152). He says in one couplet that the tender sprouts of its topmost branches were radiating with dazzling brilliance by the side of the moon in the skies. It was on one leaf of that tree that Vishnu or Hari was

sleeping and it was under its shade that Siva was teaching the Vedas.

> "அரிதனி துயின்ற தோரிலை வரளவை யிருந்தநீ ழலது
> விரிசுடர் கிவந்த சாயைமதி மிசையிடை விளங்கு
> சோலையது"

Evidently the shade of the banian tree was considered very conducive for learning and deep meditation.

At the entrance or by the side of most of the villages there would be tanks supplying drinking water to the residents. Huge banian or pipal trees were grown by the side of these tanks and on river-beds also and revered as sacred. Some idol or other was placed at its foot and worshipped. As the Tamils wanted to adore their gods as soon as they finished their daily bath in the small hours of the morning, gods under trees are found in plenty near the water-side all over their country. The god was supposed to dwell in the tree or under its shade. The hugeness and the age of such trees added solemnity and awe to their worship. Owls and other portentous birds, which naturally would take shelter under their foliage, would scream during nights and such screams would instil fear into the minds, especially of the women-folk and they invariably interpreted such screams as ominous.

> "எம்மூர் வாயில் உண்டுறை தடைஇய
> கடவுள் முதுமரத் துடனுறை பழகிய
> தேயா வளைவாய்த் தெண்கட் கூருகிர்
> வாய்ப்பறை யசாஅம் வலிமுந்து கூகை"

(Naṟṟiṇai—83)

**The Margosa**

The margosa tree was always connected with some goddess or other and worshipped as a sacred temple. The warriors of the Malava country, which formed part of the Tamil-land, forming themselves into a marauding band, used to raid the neighbouring lands and capture cattle herds. In one of such raids, a band of them noticed that their arrows had missed the aim and had run off their mark. From this they understood that the goddess of the locality, residing on a margosa tree, was displeased with them. They became very much alarmed and to appease the infuriated deity of the fat-stemmed margosa tree, they sacrificed a bull and sprinkled its blood at the foot of that tree. After propitiating the goddess in this manner, they cooked and dined on the flesh of the victimised bull, with the consolation that the favour of the deity had been won.

"வயவா ளெறிந்து வில்லி னீக்கிப்
பயநிரை தழீஇய கடுங்கண் மழவர்
அம்புசேட் படுத்து வன்புலத் துய்த்தெனத்
தெய்வஞ் சேர்ந்த பராரை வேம்பிற்
கொழுப்பா வெறிந்து குருதி தூஉய்ப்
புலவுப் புழுக்குண்ட வான்க ணகலறை"

(Akanānūru—309)

In almost all the Kāḷi temples in South India a margosa tree will be found in the precincts. Those who decorate and masquerade themselves as a Kāḷi, always carry a bunch of margosa leaves in their hands. This shows the close affinity of the Kāḷi with this tree. The cutting down of a margosa tree is deemed in the southern districts as equivalent to the murder of an innocent young

girl and that pernicious deed will be chastised with dire calamity. The popular belief is that it will end in the dreadful result of a toll of some life dear to the family of the offender. Thus margosa is the exclusive temple of Kāḷi, the furious goddess of the demons. But Kāḷi is worshipped under various names.

The margosa leaf is a potent charm against all devils and witchcraft. It was supposed that a wounded person was liable to be molested at night by evil spirits and goblins. To avoid their nocturnal visitings, margosa leaves were hung on the doorway and on the roof. This we see even now in houses where one is laid up in bed with small-pox, chicken-pox or measles, which ills are popularly believed to be the scourge of Kāḷi. In fact those diseases are called Amman or Māriyāyi, denoting Kāli. The patient is also asked to gently rub his body, when needed, with margosa leaves to allay the physical irritation. It may be due to the germicidal tendencies and sanitary properties of the margosa which is rich with medicinal value; but, whatever it may be, for the ancient people, the cause was not known but the effect was seen. Other precautions to keep aloof the devils were, the hoisting of the leaves of the iṛavam, *i. e.*, the serpent-champak tree or Mesua Ferrea (Nāgasambaṅgi), the burning of incense and white mustard, the playing of music, bells and flute and the singing of the Kānchi or Kurinchi tune.

> " தீங்கனி யிரவமொடு வேம்புமனைச் செரீஇ
> வாங்குமருப் பியாழொடு பல்லியங் கறங்கக்
> கைபயப் பெயர்த்து மையிழு திழுகி

ஐயவி சிதறி யாம்ப லூதி
இசைமணி யெறிந்து காஞ்சி பாடி
நெடுநகர் வரைப்பிற் கடிநறை புகைஇக்
காக்கம் வம்மோ காதலந் தோழி
வேந்துறு விழுமந் தாங்கிய
பூம்பொறிக் கழற்கால் நெடுந்தகை புண்ணே.”

(Puranānūru—281(

Thus during the days of war in ancient times in the Tamil country, the houses of soldiers at night would be festooned with margosa leaves and resounding with music set to the Kānchi tune while incense would be burnt to protect the wounded from evil spirits.

“ வேம்புசினை யொடிப்பவுங் காஞ்சி பாடவும்
நெய்யுடைக் கையர் ஐயவி புகைப்பவும்
எல்லா மனையுங் கல்லென் றனவே.

(Puranānūru—296)

The power of the margosa or neem leaf to ward off the devils is very great and so this is called, ‘the leaf with a file-like edge, that is the devil's enemy,’ (aravāi-kadippagai), in Manimēkalai, VII, 73. One may legitimately be led to surmise that this belief might have induced the early Pāndyas to take to the garland of the neem leaves and flowers, as their royal emblem. The belief current even today is that if the door-way and window-frames of a house are made of the timber of a margosa tree, that house would be devil-proof and no spirits would enter inside.

There is another belief that even when a tree has been felled, sawn into planks and used to

build a house, the woodland spirit might still be lurking in the timber. The spirit occupying a tree was thought to be capable of following the hewn branches or stem of that tree to any length of time and distance imaginable. So, after the completion of a newly built house and just before its occupation fowls and eggs are sacrificed to propitiate any possible spirit that may be remaining in the wooden structure of the new building. The tree spirit, being thus put in good humour, will desist from doing any harm to the inmates of the house, nay, it will move itself to some other tree in the forest and leave the inmates of the house in peace. The carpenter plays an important part in this ceremony and in the southern districts this is known as Taccukaḻittal (தச்சுக்கழித்தல்). It is a ceremony performed by carpenters prior to house-warming with a view to exorcize evil spirits. The general belief is that one will not prosper in a new house, if he has not already performed this ceremony and purified the place. It is interesting to note that the Toradjas of Celebes entertain such beliefs and they kill a goat, a pig or a buffalo and smear all the wood-work of a new dwelling with its blood. It is believed that after this propitiation the spirit or deity inhabiting the wood will leave the house and seek a fresh abode in some other tree.

**Taccu-k-kaḻittal**

In olden days boats and other sailing vessels were made of wood and it was conceived that the spirit of the tree whose wood was used for making the vessel would be clinging to it. It was feared that if that spirit was irritated, it would upset the

vessel in the midst of the sea. So the sailors and fishermen worshipped and palliated the wrath of the spirit of the boat with periodical offerings of fragrant incense. When the boat or vessel was worn out and cast aside, they did not offer their worship as usual. It was discarded like an old useless bull.

**Worship of Wooden Boats**

> " ஈண்டு பெருந் தெய்வத் தியாண்டுபல கழிந்தெனப்
> பார்த்துறைப் புணரி யலைத்தலிற் புடைகொண்டு
> மூத்துவினை போகிய முரிவா யம்பி
> நல்லெருது நடைவளம் வைத்தென வுழவர்
> புல்லுடைக் காவிற் றொழில்விட் டாங்கு
> நறுவிரை நன்புகை கொடாஅர் சிறுவீ
> ஞாழலொடு கெழீஇய புன்னையங் கொழுநிழன்
> முழவுமுதற் பிணிக்குந் துறைவ." (Naṟṟiṇai 315)

**Tree Marriage**

During recent times, another practice has also come into vogue in the Tamil-land and that reminds us of the fact that trees also may be solemnly married one to another, often with elaborate ritual and costly feasting. They plant the pipal and the margosa side by side in such a way that they grow together, one cleaving to the other. This is called the wedding of the pipal and the margosa. He who performs this ceremony and instals the Nāga images under them is believed to be blessed with children and prosperity thereafter. It is also believed that going round these trees a number of times early in the morning, after a cool bath will cure sterility. In this connection it is well to remember that the breeze of the margosa is generally considered to be good for health. The air breathed by the pipal tree in the morning

hours might possess some purifying properties that might act well on the human system while taking brisk rounds and swift turns about this tree in conjunction with the margosa. Any one will feel refreshed and restored by this valuable exercise, at any rate, and more so in the case of women. The belief connected with Nāgapratishṭa seems to be of late origin as there is no allusion to be found in the early Tamil works regarding this practice.

**The Pipal: Arasu**

The pipal tree (ficus religiosa) is still an object of universal worship throughout India, which no Hindu would willingly cut or injure and beneath the shade of which he would be reluctant to tell an untruth. This is the tree of knowledge (bodhi or bo-tree) under which the Buddha gained enlightenment. We have already seen how the worship of the pipal is represented in a seal of the Indus Valley. At the present day the pipal is inviolably sacred. Though pipal plants undermine houses and temples, the Hindus deem it a sin to uproot them. It has been rightly called Arasamaram, the King of Trees. Colossal buildings and walls may go to ruins but not one leaf of the pipal will be touched. It is even more sacred with the Buddhists, as can be seen in Ceylon to-day. The mysterious rustling of its tremulous leaves is no doubt one cause of the superstitious awe with which this tree is regarded and worshipped. Near river-beds and lakes and in all watery places this tree is grown and an image of Gaṇesh placed under its shade with some Nāga images. This tree establishes itself firmly even in some railway-station plat-forms and people render

homage to it. (e. g. Tanjore Junction S. I. Ry.). Performing circumambulation round the pipal tree is a duty imposed on every Hindu. There is a famous pipal tree at Srimūshṇam in the South Arcot District where married couples throng together on festive occasions and circumambulate the tree with their hands linked together.

There was a giant vāgai tree, the sirissa, in the cemetry grounds near Pukār. It was believed to have been infested by bands of dreadful demons and famished furies. That spot was called Vāgai-manḍram. There were also other spots like Vanni-manḍram (Indian Mesquit), the resort of Kāpālikas, Veḷḷil-manḍram (wood-apple) and Iratti-manḍram (Jujube tree), to which resorted mendicant ascetics making garlands of broken skulls, all haunted by demons.

**The Vāgai**

" தான்றியு மொடுவையு முழிஞ்சிலு மோங்கிக்
கான்றையுஞ் சூரையுங் கள்ளியு மடர்ந்து
காய்பசிக் கடும்பேய் கணங்கொண் டீண்டு
மாலமர் பெருஞ்சினை வாகை மன்றமும்
வெண்ணிணந் தடியொடு மாந்தி மகிழ்சிறந்து
புள்ளிறை கூரும் வெள்ளின் மன்றமுஞ்
சுடலை நோன்பிக ளொடியா வுள்ளமொடு
மடைதீ யுறுக்கும் வன்னி மன்றமும்
விரத யாக்கைய ருடைதலை தொகுத்தாங்
கிருந்தொடர்ப் படுக்கு மிரத்தி மன்றமும்."

(Maṇimēkalai–VI 80–89)

The vāgai tree was also worshipped as the temple of the Goddess of Victory, Durga. This is known from the commentary to the phrase Kaḍavuḷ Vāgai ', quoted below. It is thus we see the victorious kings and their soldiers wearing chaplets

of vāgai flowers, as a symbol of their victory. It was a token of the favour shown them by the goddess of war. The Chēra soldiers added vāgai flowers to their chaplets of palmyra-flowers to celebrate their victory in battles.

> "தார்புரிந் தன்ன வாளுடை விழவிற்
> போர்படு மள்ளர் போந்தொடு தொடுத்த
> கடவுள் வாகைத் துய்வீ பேய்ப்ப."
>
> (Pathirṟupattu–66)

**The Wars of the Flowers**

The wars of the ancient Tamils may rightly be called the Wars of the flowers. The different stages of their wars may broadly be brought under eight heads. At every stage the soldiers and their commanders, including their kings wore different flowers in the form of chaplets on their heads to signify the purpose for which the war was undertaken. As a preliminary to a war, the party on the offensive side first took surprise raids into the enemy's territory to lift the cattle found there and thus clear the war-zone of all innocent and helpless creatures. These raiding parties wore the Veṭchi flowers. (Scarlet ixora or Ixora coccinea) on their heads. A special and solemn ceremony was observed in the temple of Durga, the goddess of war and the Veṭchi flowers were presented to the soldiers as a gift or boon from the ferocious goddess as a guarantee of success in their dangerous enterprise.

> 'உட்குடைச் சீறூ ரொருமகனா னிரைகொள்ள
> வுற்றகாலை
> வெட்சி மலர் புனைய வெள்வாளுழத்தியும்
> வேண்டும் போலும்

வெட்சி மலர் புனைய வெள்வாளுழத்தியும்
வேண்டின் வேற்றூர்க்
கட்சியுட் காரிகடிய குரலிசைத்துக் காட்டும்
போலும்."

(Silappadikāram-Vēṭṭuvavari)

[ When the hero would pray the goddess of the sword and wear the Vetchi flower, the king-crow or the black bird would make a violent scream in the woods of his enemy's territory. ]

Capturing the cows in the neighbouring state was an act of war which thus paved the way for a successful invasion. But nobody would lose the herds and meekly sit at home. Soldiers of the country, into which depredatory hordes had descended, would flock to the banner and rush forward to track the enemy and retrieve the herds. The party thus resisting would wear the Karandai flowers (Indian Globe-thistle.)

When a king decides to march against his enemies with a view to annexing their territories, he would wear the Vanchi flower (Glabrous mahua of the Malabar coast or four-seeded willow). So Vanchi was the symbol of the aggressors. Getting scent of this invasion and before the enemy steals a march over him, the defending king would proceed against the marching enemy to arrest his progress. While doing so, his soldiers would distinguish themselves by wearing the Kānchi flower (River portia ஆற்றுப்பூவரசு). So garlands of Kānchi flowers worn by soldiers indicated the nature of their war-aim, viz., that of defending themselves against the onslaught of the enemy.

Sometimes a king might not come out and give an open battle to the enemy but take refuge in his fort or citadel; or perhaps he might have been trapped or besieged while camping inside a fort. In such cases of a war of siege, the besiegers who were engaged in storming a fort, would wear the Uḻignai flowers (Balloon vine) and the besieged army would wear the flower of nocci (the five-leaved chaste tree). The warriors who were engaged in battle on either side would wear the Tumbai flowers (Flower toombay), as a mark of their valour and the triumph in battle was signalised by the wearing of Vāgai (Fragrant Sirissa). These flowers of war might also be made of gold and presented by kings to their soldiers. They at times wore the leaves also along with the flowers. This practice of donning these flowers as the badge of war applied to the whole rank and file of the soldiery.

The implements of war and other accessorial musical instruments were also reverentially decorated with these signal flowers. To cite but only one instance, when the war-drum of Chēramān Perunchēral Irumporai, the Destroyer of Thakaḍūr, was carried in a processian for a holy ablution, it was decorated with peacock feathers, and garlands of flowers inter-laced with the gold-coloured tender leaves of the Uḻignai. War-drums were cherished as sacred and worshipped as the throne of the goddess of war, Durga.

*" மாசற விசித்த வார்புறு வள்பின்*
*மைபடு மருங்குல் பொலிய மஞ்ஞை*
*ஒலிநெடும் பீலி யொண்பொறி மணித்தார்*

பொலங்குழை யுழிஞையொடு பொலியச் சூட்டிக்
குருதி வேட்கை யுருகெழு முரசம்
மண்ணி வாரா வளவை." (Puranānūru—50)

This Ulignai is a dense lengthy creeper with glistening leaves and is also called Korrān (கொற்றான்). Pāndyan Neduncheliyan, the conqueror of Talaiyālankānam, is said to have worn the green leaves of the margosa with Ulignai flowers when he started for battle on his chariot. Poet Idaikundrūr Kilār was deeply moved by the imposing personality and the grand and majestic appearance of that heroic lad of the blue blood and melted into the following sweet strains of sonorous rhythm :—

" கிண்கிணி களைந்த கால் ஒண்கழல் தொட்டுக்
குடுமி களைந்தநுதல் வேம்பின் ஒண்தளிர்
நெடுங்கொடி யுழிஞைப் பவரொடு மிலைந்து
குறுந்தொடி கழித்தகைச் சாபம் பற்றி
நெடுந் தேர்க் கொடுஞ்சி பொலிய நின்றோன்
யார் கொல் வாழ்கவவன் கண்ணி."

(Puranānūru 77)

**Emblematic flowers of kings**

In this stanza the poet wishes long life to the floral emblem sparkling on the diadem of the mighty prince of the Pāndyas. It is worth while noting here that the Pāndya King was said to have worn the Ulignai with the margosa. The Pāndya Kings wore margosa leaves as their royal emblem. Apart from the flowers above mentioned, the three ancient crowned dynasties of the Tamil country had worn distinct flowers and garlands of a different type as their royal and conventional emblem. Thus the Chōlas betook themselves to Ātti, the holy

mountain ebony. The Cheras had the emblem of palm-leaves and the Pāṇḍyas, the margosa leaves and flowers. On solemn occasions, like that of war and on festal days the kings adorned their heads, after a sanctimonious bath, with their emblematic flowers, obtained from their sacredly-protected family trees. Neḍuncheḻiyan was said to have worn his neem leaves in this ceremonious fashion, when he went out for battle.

> " மூதூர் வாயிற் பனிக்கய மண்ணி
> மன்ற வேம்பின் ஒண்குழை மலைந்து
> தெண்கிணை முன்னர்க் களிற்றி னியலி
> வெம்போர்ச் செழியனும் வந்தனன். "

(Purananūru–79)

Here we see beyond a shadow of doubt, some solemn ceremony being observed at the time of wearing those token flowers. The superstitious respect shown to this practice betrays a faint trace of its totemistic origin as we find the royal dynasties possessing their own tribal distinctions and symbols in the form of different flowers and this practice is traced to a very ancient past whose springs are lost in mythology. It is said that even Lord Siva wore the charming Uḻignai when he burnt to powder the three flying fortresses, the Tiripura. This is how the Uḻignai is glorified and sanctified.

> " மயங்காத தார்ப்பெருமை மற்றறிவார் யாரே
> வியங்கரணை மூன்று மெரித்தான்—நயங்கினர்ப்
> பூக்கொ ளிதழிப் புரிசெஞ் சடையானு
> மாக்கொ ளுழிஞை மலைந்து."

(Purapporuḷ Veṇbāmālāi–102)

In Takkayâgapparaṇi, Oṭṭakkūttar says that Vīrabhadra wore the tender leaves of the sacred mango tree, standing at the Siva temple of Kānchipuram, when he started to destroy the sacrifice of Takkan.

" கச்சியிற்சுர சூதகீதள பல்லவங்களை விறகலித்
துச்சியிற்பனி வீசகண்ணியின் வெண்ணிலாவை
யொதுக்கவே."

This confirms the fact that the ancients believed to have derived additional strength by wearing chaplets and garlands of sacred leaves and flowers while fighting.

**The Kaḍamba.**

A ferocious god was believed to be dwelling in a marām tree or veṇkaḍambu (a sea-side Indian oak) which was standing in the mandṛam of a village. The deity was believed to have the power of chastising the evil-doers and the wicked with unabated wrath. So this god was held in awe and adored with zeal and reverence.

" மன்ற மராஅத்த பேஎமுதிர் கடவுள்
கொடியோர்த் தெறூஉ மென்ப."

(Kuruntogai–87)

Hero-stones were installed at the foot of marām trees, with names of the fallen heroes engraved to identify them. The divinity that dwelt in such hero-stones instilled awe and reverence in the hearts of the passers-by and was worshipped as the ruling deity of the vicinity.

" கல்லெறிந் தெழுதிய நல்லரை மராஅத்த
கடவு ளோங்கிய காடேசு கவலை."

(Malaipaḍukaḍām 395–396)

The reverence for the Kaḍambu tree of the red flower was enhanced by the fact that God Muruga was pleased to wear always a garland of red Kaḍambu flowers.

" இருள்படப் பொதுளிய பராஅரை மராஅத்து
உருள்பூந் தண்டார் புரளு மார்பினன்."

(Thirumurugāṟṟuppaḍai 10–11)

" கார் மலர்க் குறிஞ்சி சூடிக் கடம்பின்
சீர்மிகு நெடுவேட் பேணி."

(Maduraikānchi 613–614)

God Muruga not only wears the scarlet Kaḍambu flowers but is also posited as a God dwelling in the Kaḍamba tree. So He is also called Kaḍamban.

" கடம்பமர் நெடுவேள்."

(Perumpāṇāṟṟupaḍai–75)

" கடம்பமர்ந்து ", " கடம்பமரணி நிலை."

(Paripāḍal–XIX 2 & 104)

" செல்வக் கடம்பமர்ந்தான்."

(Ainthiṇai Aimpathu !)

" நங்கடம்பனைப் பெற்றவள் பங்கினன்." (Tēvāram)

When enumerating the places haunted by Muruga, the Kaḍamba tree smiling with new blossoms, is also mentioned as one.

" சதுக்கமுஞ் சந்தியும் புதுப்பூங் கடம்பும்."

(Tirumurugāṟṟupaḍai–225)

Hence the ancients thought that by worshipping the Kaḍamba tree they were worshipping Muruga, in the same way as the devotees of Siva

and Tirumāl worshipped the banian tree. Before entering the arena of bull-fighting, the combatants worshipped the gods dwelling under the shade of the banian and the holy, hoary, and huge Marām (Kaḍambu) trees with due care and devotion so that they might be vouchsafed with success in the ensuing fight.

> " துறையும் ஆலமுந் தொல்வலி மராஅமும்
> முறையுளி பராஅய்ப் பாய்ந்தனர் தொழூஉ."
>
> (Kalitogai–101)

We get an inkling into the mode of worshipping these trees by a stray reference found in Kalitogai by way of a simile. The entrails slit open by the horns of bulls in a bull-fight were carried to the skies by kites and when dropped down, they fell on the adjacent Kaḍambu and banian trees and seen dangling on their branches. These are compared to garlands hung up there to propitiate the gods tenanting those trees :—

> " ..........................................................ஏறுதங்
> கோலஞ்செய் மருப்பிஞற் றோண்டிய வரிக்குடர்
> ஞாலக் கொண்டெழூஉம் பருந்தின் வாய்வழீஇ
> ஆலுங் கடம்பு மணிமார் விலங்கிட்ட
> மாலைபோற் றூங்குஞ் சினை." (Kalitogai–106)

This shows that garlands were tied round the trunk and on the branches of these sacred trees and the gods were believed to be pleased with them. Even to-day this is a familiar sight in South India. How true is the saying of a Babylonian sage of 2100 B. C. or earlier! "The life of yesterday,

it is every day the same." On trees believed to have been inhabited by some goddess, are hung some interesting and curious objects like winnowing-fans, dolls, toy-carts, cradles, bangles, et cetera. These are gifts from devotees who, as a mark of their gratitude for the fulfilment of their prayers, ranging from the birth of a babe to the curing of a disease, present their promised offerings and satiate the deity. The tree will be clad with a red cloth at the foot and anointed with oily red ocre, sandal paste and saffron or Kunkum. The anointing red paste is called manchaḷ-ney or mancaṇai (மஞ்சணை). It is a turmeric paint mixed with oil and smeared on idols of minor deities and sacred trees. Rice is cooked and offered in front of the trees. This is known as Pongal-iṭṭu-Paḍaittal (பொங்கலிட்டுப் படைத்தல்). Goats, fowls and eggs are also sacrificed. Even toddy and fish are offered. These are performed to the accompaniment of nerve-gripping music played on fifes and timbrels and tabors.

About two thousand years back, there was standing a huge Kaḍambu tree at the foot of the Tirupparaṅkunḍram hill, near Madura. It was devoutly held as a divine tree most sacred to Muruga who wielded the spear. A graphic description of the manner of worship done to this tree is given in Paripāḍal. The devotees marched to the sacred Kaḍambu with great enthusiasm, after sun-set, every-day, playing music. They carried with them their reverential offerings of sandal, incense, holy fire, festoons, garlands and honey-dewed flowers, tender leaves, cloths bearing flower— designs and bells and spears. They

invoked the grace of the tree with laudations. A goat was found tied to the waist of the tree. The devotees were filled with great ecstacy and contentment. And they craved not for anything else, even heavenly bliss, in exchange for this delightful devotional merriment.

> " தேம்படு மலர்குழை பூந்துகில் வடிமணி
> ஏந்திலை சுமந்து சாந்தம் விரைஇ
> விடையரை யசைத்த வேலன் கடிமரம்
> பரவின ருரையொடு பண்ணிய விசையினர்
> விரிமலர் மதுவின் மரநனை குன்றத்துக்
> கோலெரி கொளைநறை புகைகொடி யொருங்கெழ
> மாலை மாலை யடியுறை யியைநர்
> மேலோ ருறையுளும் வேண்டுநர் யாஅர்."
>
> (Paripāḍal—XVII 1—8)

**The Ōmai.** Furies were imagined to be dwelling at the bottom stem of ōmai (Tooth-brush) trees in forests.

> " சூர்முத லிருந்த வோமையம் புறவின்."
>
> (Akanānūru–291)

**Under the Thistles too.** People living in barren, dry or sandy parts where trees were scarce, had contented themselves by installing gods under the meagre shade of briars and prickly pear. A minstrel while trudging his way through some dry parts of the country suddenly observed some ominous signs which portented death for his patron. He immediately prayed to a way-side deity which was found housed under the poor shade of a thistle to save his master from any mishap that might befall him.

"களர, கள்ளி நீழற் கடவுள் வாழ்த்திப்
பசிபடு மருங்குலை கசிபுகை தொழாஅக்
காணலென் கொல்லென வினவினை வரூஉம்
பாண." (Puranānūru–260)

**The Vilvam**

The Bilva or Bael tree (வில்வம்) needs special mention. It is the Stalavritcha or Sacred Tree of the special holy order, at Thiruvaikā. The trifoliate bael leaf is specially used for the worship of Siva. Its leaf is of a triple form—with three leaflets and probably on that account consecrated to Siva with His three functions. The form of the leaf also reminds us of His three eyes. The nut of a bael fruit is of a large size, assuming a pyramidal or conical shape with a rugged surface. The nut is dovoutly worshipped by Saivites as a Linga. Milk and flowers are offered at the foot of the bael tree and adored. In Siva temples the bael leaf offered to Siva, is taken and presented to the devotees as prasātham or divine gift. In the same way, in Vaishṇavite temples the basil or tuḷasi leaf is offered instead of the bilva, as Vishṇu is fond of tuḷasi. The bilva is supposed to possess some intrinsic divinity in itself. Its leaves have got great medicinal effect.

**The Vēngai**

The Vēngai or East Indian kino tree also is a favourite habitation for gods. This tree rising aloft by the side of paddy fields, with flowers sparkling like fire, would hardly fail to captivate the imagination of the ancients and they did not hesitate to conjure a deity to be dwelling in that tree, as the guarding angel of the fields around.

"எரிமருள் வேங்கைக் கடவுள் காக்குங்
குருகார் கழனி." (Naṛṛiṇai–216)

At Kāmūr, which belonged to a chieftain, called Kaḻuvuḷ, there was a big Vēngai tree with a rugged bottom and this tree possessed a fierce demon or Būtam. Its fresh flowers had a pleasing fragrant scent.

"மாவண் கழுவுள் காமூ ராங்கட்
பூதந் தந்த பொரியரை வேங்கைத்
தண்கமழ் புதுமலர் நாறும்." (Akanānūru- 65)

It is said that the Vēngai tree had its flowering seasons and those seasons were considered to be very auspicious and good.

"நன்னாட் பூத்த நாகிள வேங்கை."
(Akanānūru–85)

"நன்னாள் வேங்கைவீ நன்களம் வரிப்ப."
(Akanānūru–133)

"நன்னாள் வேங்கைப் பொன்மருள் புதுப்பூ."
(Naṛṛiṇai–384)

"நாள் வேங்கை பொன்விரியு நன்மலை."
(Tiṇaimālai–20)

"நாள் வேங்கை நீழலுள்." (Tiṇaimālai–31)

"நன்னாட் பூத்த பொன்னிணர் வேங்கை."
(Yāpparunkala Viruthi, Sūtram–6)

"நன்னாள் வேங்கைப் பொன்னேர் புதுமலர்."
(Yāpparunkala Viruthi, Sūtram–16)

"பிணியவிழ்ந்து நன்னாளாற் பூப்பனவும் வேங்கை."
(Yāpparunkaḷa Viruthi, Sūtram–37)

And thus a long catena of instances may be cited to prove that the Vēngai is scarcely mentioned anywhere but with a stress laid on its primary feature of blooming at a time which was considered to be most auspicious—and auspicious for what? For contracting marriages. As the flowering season of this tree was auspicious, the people residing in the mountainous regions which were abounding in Vēngai trees, celebrated their marriages during that season. During those days marriages were performed when the crescent of the moon had begun its growth, after the passing of the New Moon. So the appearance of the moon in the sky and the flowers in the Vēngai tree, was an unfailing signal for the performance of impending marriages. During this period ladies in love would send their maids to their lovers to expedite their marriages and there are a number of instances to prove this custom.

" பைம்புதல், வேங்கையு மொள்ளிணர் விரிந்தன
நெடுவெண் திங்களு மூர்கொண் டன்றே."

(Akanānūru–2)

" நின்னுறு விழுமங் கூறக் கேட்டு
வருமே தோழி நன்மலை நாடன்
வேங்கை விரிவிட நோக்கி
வீங்கிறைப் பணைத்தோள் வரைந்தனன் கொளற்கே"

(Kalitogai–38)

" அன்னையும், நன்னுள் வேங்கையு மலர்கமா வினியென
என்முக நோக்கினள்."

(Naṟṟiṇai–206)

"மையார் கதலி வனத்து வருக்கைப் பழம்விழுதேன்
எய்யா தயின்றிள மந்திகள் சோரு மிருஞ்சிலம்பா
மெய்யா வரியதெ னம்பலத் தான்மதி யூர்கொள்
வெற்பின்
மொய்யார் வளரிள வேங்கைபொன் மாலையின்
முன்னினவே."

(Tirukkōvaiyār–262)

Thus when marriages were performed during the flowering season of the Vēngai tree, brides would adorn themselves with garlands of Vēngai flowers. The wearing of Vēngai flowers by a girl was a sure sign that she had been newly married. Girls, about to be married, would be anxiously awaiting for the day when they could wear the scented Vēngai flowers; and young lovers would console their beloved fiance'es by promising to solemnise their union by the sacred wed-lock during the flowering season of the Vēngai. The sweet smell of the flowers improves love. Man, after all, is a child of Nature. And in some of the most trying jerks in the vicissitudes of love amours, the couple must turn to Nature for light and lead. So partners in love would be anxiously awaiting for the bloom of the Vēngai.

"நிதியந் துஞ்சு நிவந் தோங்கு வரைப்பின்
வதுவை மகளிர் கூந்தல் கமழ்கொள
வங்கூ ழாட்டிய வங்குழை வேங்கை
நன்பொன் அன்ன நறுந்தா துதிர."

(Akanānūru–378)

" அகலறை மலர்ந்த வரும்முதிர் வேங்கை
யொள்ளிணர்த் தொடலை தைஇ மெல்லென
நல்வரை நாடன் தற்பாராட்ட
யாங்கு வல்லுநள் கொல்." (Akanânūru-105)

" நுணங்குநுண் பனுவற் புலவன் பாடிய
வினமழை தவழு மேழிற் குன்றத்துக்
கருங்கால் வேங்கைச் செம்பூம் பிணையல்
ஐதேந் தல்குல் யாமணிந் துவக்குஞ்
சின்னாள் கழிக." (Akanānūru-345)

A maiden was waiting for her lover to come and claim her hand in marriage. He had long been absent. A Vēngai tree was standing by the side of her house in a mandṛam. The tree had its nascent budding and blossomed for the first time in the season. It was observed by some young striplings tending cattle and they at once greeted the flowers with a hue and cry, giving vent to their exhileration of joy. This noise the maiden heard and in spite of her, her eyes ran down tears. The Vēngai had flowered and the wedding season had set in. But where was her lover? He had not arrived yet. Then how could she restrain her tears?

" யாமே காமந் தாங்கவுந் தாந்தம்
கெழுதகை மையின் அழுதன தோழி
கன்றாற்றுப் படுத்த புன்றலைச் சிறாஅர்
மன்ற வேங்கை மலர்பத நோக்கி
ஏறு திட்ட வேமப் பூசல்
விண்டோய் விடரகத் தியம்பும்
குன்றநாடற் கண்டவெங் கண்ணே."
(Kuruntogai-241)

The girls of to-day have a craze for gold and they cover their frail frames with an enormous load of jewels. But the girls of those days placed a higher value on flowers of the golden Vēngai. The fresh flowers of the Vēngai would be as beautiful as ornamented gold on which a crafty goldsmith had exhibited his skill. Young maidens would be burning with desire to wear these beautiful flowers on their head but they should marry to adorn their hair with these flowers which the bridegrooms should present to them. A maiden separated from her lover, wailed to her maid as to where to go and find him out to receive the gift of the gold-coloured Vēngai.

" கருங்கால் வேங்கை நாளுறு புதுப்பூப்
பொன்செய் கம்மியன் கைவினை கடுப்பத்
தகைவனப் புற்ற கண்ணழி கட்டழித்
தொலியல் கூந்தல் அணிபெறப் புனைஇக்
காண்டற் காதல் கைம்மிகக் கடைஇயாற்
கியாங்கா குவங்கொல் தோழி." (Naṟṟiṇai-313)

Even marriage negotiations were carried on under the shade of the Vēngai tree where both the parties would sit and discuss the terms of the marriage. The bridegroom would be seen by the father of the girl when the former would demand the hand of his daughter in marriage and the latter would formally give his consent. This sort of betrothal would take place under a Vēngai tree. So this tree was also called 'Manḍral Vēngai' or Marriage Tree or the Tree of Marriage.

" மென்றோட் கிழவனும் வந்தனன் நுந்தையும்
மன்றல் வேங்கைக் கீழிருந்து
மணம்நயந் தனனம் மலைகிழ வோற்கே."

(Kalitogai-42)

" கடிநாள் வேங்கை."

(Perunkathai-I 50 : line 26)

It was also the practice for the young girl betrothed, the fiance'e, to offer Vēngai flowers to the family deity or Aṇaṅgu or the mountain-god just before the nuptials, amidst so many other sweet offerings, imploring the deity to bless her marriage which was about to be celebrated. The brides with ineffable joy offered also their thanks-giving to the deity for thus favouring them with a happy fulfilmént of their wish. The Vēngaiflowers, for this worship, would be brought from the Mandṛam which was held to be more sacred. Here we see how the Vēngai flowers were used for every stage of the wedding.

" குன்றக் குறவன் காதன் மடமகள்
மன்ற வேங்கை மலர்சில கொண்டு
மலையுறை கடவுள் குலமுதல் வழுத்தித்
தேம்பலிச் செய்த ஈர்நறுங் கையள்
மலர்ந்த காந்தள் நாறிக்
கலிழ்ந்த கண்ணளெம் அணங்கி யோளே."

(Iyinkurunūru-259)

Not only the betrothal but also the actual marriage was celebrated under the shade of the flowery Vēngai tree :—

" புனவேங்கைத் தாதுறைக்கும் பொன்னறைமுன்றி
னனவிற் புணர்ச்சி நடக்குமா மன்றோ
நனவிற் புணர்ச்சி நடக்கலு மாங்கே
கனவிற் புணர்ச்சி கடிதுமா மன்றோ."

(Kalitogai-42)

The marriage feast was celebrated with a gala dance, called Kuravai, in which both men and women joined hands and this dance was staged in the Manḍram, under the shade of the Vēngai where its flowers would be sprinkling their aromatic scented dust. This lovely scene was enacted with all pomp and mirth. It may now be assumed as certain that the flowering season of the Vengai tree was adumbrated with Kuravai dances by men and women with hilarious ecstacy under its shade and it was celebrated as a ceremonial festival. The Vēngai was a tree commonly found only in mountainous regions and its flowering time synchronised with the harvest of cereals and millet, the staple food of the hilly tracts. So it was indeed a happy season and the people, with plenty in their homes, and having to do nothing for some time to come, indulged in merry feasting and dancing. And this season was also a fit one for uniting lovers in happy wedlock and crown them with conjugal felicity.

" குன்ற வேலிச் சிறுகுடி யாங்கண்
மன்ற வேங்கை மணநாட் பூத்த
மணியே ரரும்பிற் பொன்வீ தாஅய்
வியலறை வரிக்கு முன்றிற் குறவர்
மனைமுதிர் மகளிரொடு குரவை தூங்கும்
ஆர்கலி விழவுக்களங் கடுப்ப."

(Akanānūru-232)

This roistering and riotous Kuravai dance was staged under the Kino tree (Vēngai) after the men and women had quaffed the ripened and well-seasoned liquor from bamboo tubes:—

" வாங்கமை பழுனிய நறவுண்டு
வேங்கை முன்றிற் குரவையுங் கண்டே."

(Naṟṟiṇai–276)

The millet fields in the mountainous parts would be surrounded by Vēngai trees. When the ancients observed the strange phenomenon of the millet ripening and the Vēngai flowering at the same time, they made it a custom to reap the millet fields as soon as the Vēngai showed its flowers. This led to their waiting for the blossoming of flowers on the Vēngai tree for harvesting their fields which would be guarded till then by young maidens, from birds and animals. The millet fields provided the convenient rendezvous for the meeting of young lovers. As soon as they saw the Vēngai tree flowering, they would know that they could not meet any more on the sly, by the side of the millet fields and so, would have to shift their tryst to some other place. As the Vēngai tree forebode the coming harvest, the Vēngai was called the Tree of Prediction. (Kaṇivāi Vēngai)

" குருடைச் சிலம்பின் அருவி பாடிக்
காரரும் பவிழ்ந்த கணிவாய் வேங்கைப்
பாவமை இதணை மேறிப் பாசினம்
வணர்குரற் சிறுதினை கடியப்
புணர்வது கொல்லோ நாளையு நமக்கே."

(Naṟṟiṇai–18)

"கணிநிற வேங்கை" (Tinaimoli-9)

"இளவேங்கை நாளுரைப்ப" (Thinaimālai-18)

"கணிவாய் வேங்கையும்"

(Perunkathai II-20: line 59)

"பன்னாளும் நின்ற விடத்தும் கணிவேங்கை
நன்னாளே நாடி மலர்தலால்—மன்னர்
உவப்ப வழிபட் டொழுகினும் செல்வம்
தொகற்பால போழ்தே தொகும்."

(Palamoli-120)

"கணிவளர் வேங்கை." (Tēvāram- )

"வடிவார் வயற்றில்லை யோன்மல யத்துநின் றும்வருதேன்
கடிவார் களிவண்டு நின்றலர் தூற்றப் பெருங்கணியார்
நொடிவார் நமக்கினி நோதக யாதுமக் கென்னுரைக்கேன்
தடிவார் தினையெமர் காவேம் பெருமலைத் தண்புனமே."

(Tirukkōvaiyār-139)

"மாதிடங் கொண்டம் பலத்துநின் றோன்வட வான்கயிலைப்
போதிடங் கொண்டபொன் வேங்கை தினைப்புனங்
கொய்கவென்று
தாதிடங் கொண்டுபொன் வீசித்தன் கள்வாய் சொரியநின்று
சோதிடங் கொண்டிதெம் மைக்கெடு வித்தது தூமொழியே"

(Tirukkōvaiyār-138)

"கணியார் கருத்தின்று முற்றிற்று." (Tirukkōvaiyār-145)

There are soul stirring resonant verses, beautifully depicting how young girls would be cursing the betrayal of the flowering Vēngai for they would sorely miss the company of their dear lovers, once the harvests were to take place. They could not any more meet their lovers on the pretext of keeping vigil over the millet fields. The Vēngai had conspired to sabotage their bark of love. Thus the blame was laid at its door. The harvest would have

been delayed for a little longer had not the Vēngai flowers made their appearance so early, quite inopportunely for the lovers. A maiden feels sorry for not plucking down the Vēngai buds in advance, thereby disabling the tree from proclaiming the hour of the harvest. That could have enabled her to indulge in her clandestine amours with her lover for some more days :—

" கரும்பனைய மென்மொழியாய் கன்னறை வாய் வேங்கை
யரும்பினைமுன் கொய்தனமே யாகிற்—பெரும்புனத்திற்
செந்தினைநன் போகஞ் சிதைப்பரோ சீர்சிறந்த
சந்தனவண் தோளையர் தாம்."

(Ḳaḷaviyaṛkārikai–page 87)

" கனைகடற் செய்தநஞ் சுண்டுகண் டார்க்கும் புலத்தமிழ்தாய்
வினைகெடச் செய்தவன் விண்டோய் கயிலை மயிலனையாய்
நனைகெடச் செய்தனை யாயி னனைக்கெடச் செய்திடுவன்
தினைகெடச் செய்திடு மாறுமுண் டோவித் திருக்கணியே.

(Tirukkōvaiyār–141)

The Vēngai also has got its Puranic importance. The popular story of Vaḷḷi's Wedding by Muruga is widely known. It is said that Muruga transformed Himself into a Vēngai tree in the midst of His love-dalliance with Vaḷḷi when the father and brothers of the latter approached the spot by surprise. This divine metamorphosis was achieved by the transformation of the Vedas, the Sivākamas and the Sāstras into the roots, the stem and the branches respectively. Vaḷḷi saved that miraculous Vēngai from being destroyed by her kinsmen. Hence the Kuravas of the hills showed a strong predilection to the Vēngai tree, which is found to be inseparably interwoven with the life of the Kuravas.

"ஆகைக்கு கர்லதன்னி னடிமுதன் மறைகளாக
வோங்கிய நடுவணெல்லா முயர்சிவ நூலதாகப்
பாங்கமர் கவடுமுற்றும் பல்கலை யாகத்தானோர்
வேங்கைபி னுருவமாகி வேற்படை வீரனின்றான்."

(Kandapurāṇam–Vaḻḻiammai Tirumaṇappaḍalam)

This is how many of the sacred trees have been described by Puranic writers. An instance may be taken from Tirukuṟṟāḻa Talapurāṇam. A Jack-fruit tree is held sacred and reverentially worshipped at Courtallam. The tree has been described as follows :—

"ஆகையாற் சதுர்வேதந் தருவாக மூலமதன்மூலமாகப்
பாகையா னவையிரண்டுங் கவராகச் சுருதியெலாம்
பணைகளாகச்
சாகையானவை பரியசாகையா வுபநிடதந் தவிராச்
சூல்கொண்
டோகையார் தருமமுதற் பெரும்பலவுங் குறும்பலவே
யுதவுமாதோ."

The sacred tree of Courtāllam is a kind of short Jack tree and is called Kurumpalā (குறும்பலா). Since it is formed of the holy Vedas, Agamas and Sastras, all the gods of the heaven are pleased to come under its shade and it is the holy shrine of Lord Siva. Feeding that tree with a pitcher of water is believed to be equal to bathing all the gods and the Big Trio.

"அப்பலவின் வடிவுசதுர் வேதவடி வாதலினாலதன் பாலாக
வெப்பல தேவருமிருக்கு மியல்பினாலொருகுட நீரிதன்பால்
வார்க்கிற்
செப்பரிய தேவருக்கு மூவருக்கு மபிடேகஞ் செய்ததாகும்"

(Kuṟṟāla Talapurāṇam)

The East Indian Kino tree is called Vēṅgai in Tamil. The word Vēṅgai means also the tiger. Vēṅgai flowers are of the sparkling yellow, which is also the colour of the tiger. So rocks covered with Vēṅgai flowers were said to be resembling tigers.

" அரும்பற மலர்ந்த கருங்கால் வேங்கை
மாத்தகட் டொள்வீ தாய துறுகல்
இரும்புலி வரிப்புறங் கடுக்கும்." (Puranānūru 202)

" கருங்கால் வேங்கை வீயுகு துறுகல்
இரும்புலிக் குருளையிற் றோன்றும்."
(Kuruntogai–47)

" மெல்லிணர் வேங்கை வியலறைத் தாயின
அழுகை மகளிர்க் குழுவை செப்ப." Paripāḍal–14)

" குறவ ரூன்றிய குரம்பை புதைய
வேங்கை தாஅய தேம்பாய் தோற்றம்
புலி செத்து." (Akanānūru–12)

" கருங்கா லினவேங்கை கான்றபூக் கன்மேல்
இருங்கால் வயவேங்கை யேய்க்கும்."
(Tiṇaimālai–26)

Elephants were said to have trembled at the sight of rocks sprinkled with the flowers of the Vēṅgai, mistaking them for tigers.

" நறமனை வேங்கையின் பூப்பயில் பாறையை நாகநண்ணி
மறமனை வேங்கை யெனநனி யஞ்சுமஞ் சார்சிலம்பா."
(Tirūcciṟṟambala Kōvaiyār–96)

The poet Kapilar draws a beautiful imagery based on this idea. A fearless tusker mistook a Vēṅgai tree, wreathed with beautiful blossoms, for a tiger and ran its tusk in great rage into the trunk of the Vēṅgai. But it could not draw it

back. And thus, in a struggling condition, raised a huge resounding yell like Rāvaṇa who was trapped under the foot of Mount Kailās, on the top of which was seated the God of the matted hair, along with His consort, Umā.

> " இமையவில் வாங்கிய வீர்ஞ்சடை யந்தண
> னுமையமர்ந் துயர்மலை யிருந்தன னாக
> வையிரு தலையி னரக்கர் கோமான்
> றொடிப்பொலி தடக்கையிற் கீழ்புகுத் தம்மலை
> யெடுக்கல் செல்லா துழப்பவன் போல
> வுறுபுலி யுருவேய்ப்பப் பூத்த வேங்கையைக்
> கறுவுகொண் டதன்முதற் குத்திய மதயானை
> நீடிரு விடரகஞ் சிலம்பக் கூய்த்தன்
> கோடுபுய்க் கல்லா துழக்கும்." (Kalitogai–38)

The first flowers of the Vēngai tree would be willingly worn by the women of the hilly parts. To obtain those flowers they would approach this sacred tree and raise an uproar of "Tiger! Tiger!!". As sacred Vēngai trees were believed to be temples of some malignant furies, they would not climb up to the branches. But by raising the cry of "Tiger! Tiger!!", the tree was said to prostrate its branches and thus provide an easy reach for the tender hands of young maidens. Hence this was a favourite sport for the girls. If the trees were stalwart ones and so could not bend their branches, they were believed to drop-down their flowers at the sound of 'Tiger'. In the old commentary of Akanānūru, it has been clearly stated that this foolish belief was prevalent among the hilly tribes.

" மலிபூஞ் சாரலென் றோழி மாரோ
டொலிசினை வேங்கை கொய்குவஞ் சென்றுழிப்
புலிபுலி யென்னும் பூசல் தோன்ற." (Akanānūrū–48)

" வலந்த வள்ளி மர னோங்கு சாரற்
கிளர்ந்த வேங்கைச் சேணெடும் பொங்கர்ப்
பொன்னேர் புதுமலர் வேண்டிய குறமகள்
இன்னா விசைய பூசல் பயிற்றலின்." (Akanānūru–52)

" தலைநாட் பூத்த பொன்னிணர் வேங்கை
மலைமா ரிடூஉ மேமப் பூசல்." (Malaipaḍukaḍām 305-306)

" கருங்கால் வேங்கை யிருஞ்சினைப் பொங்கர்
நறும்பூக் கொய்யும் பூசல்." Maduraikānchi 296–297)

Thus the prophetic Vengai played a vital part in the life of the people dwelling in the hilly regions, *i. e.*, Kurinchi. This tree was a favourite one among women, in particular, who would not profane its sanctity by climbing its branches, but would beg of the tree with violent cries of "Tiger" and the tree never failed to condescend to drop flowers which were reverentially worn by the ladies.

**Women and the Flowering of Trees**

The poets, in general, are very fond of speaking about the magic influence which a woman wields over trees of different kinds. The trees are said to respond in readiness to women. When some trees pass their flowering stage without any blossom, certain actions of women of quality were believed to cure them of the evil of sterility and they would from thence forward yield in plenty during their flowering seasons. The tree of Mādavi or kurukkatti, the common Delight of the Woods, would greet the dulcet music of a charming woman with fine blossoms. The falling of a woman's shadow

would ope the buds of a champaka tree. The Ḻilai-Pālai or the Seven-leaved milk-plant would easily reciprocate to a woman's affection or show of friendship and get itself blossomed. The Punnai or Mast-wood tree would attune itself to the dance of a woman with smiling flowers. But a Pāthiri or the yellow-flowered fragrant trumpet-flower tree should be reviled and ridiculed by women to yield flowers. It is enough if a woman dines under its shade for the Makiḻam (Pointed-leaved Ape-flower, Mimusaps elangi) to be covered with blossoms. The mere look of a woman would get flowers from the Marā or the tree of Sal. A woman's kick would spring flowers from the Asoka tree (Saroca Indica). A woman's embrace would produce flowers from the kurā or the Bottle-flower tree, and her laughter would bring bloom to the Jasmine creeper.

"எண்மா தவிசண் பகம்பாலை புன்னை யெழிற் படலி
கொண்மா மகிழ மராவொ டசோகு குராமுல்லையின்
பண்பாட வீழற் படனட்ட லாடற் பழித்தலுண்ணல்
கண்ணோக் குதையணைத் தல்சிரித் தற்கலர்க் காடுறுமே"

(Irattinaccurukkam-41)

Such like allusions to modes of florescence may sound queer to modern thought. But some such beliefs persist to the present day. If a cocoanut, mango or tamarind tree had failed to prove floriferous and fruitful, the barren tree is beaten with a pestle on a day of eclipse and this method is believed to cure the tree of its barrenness. The validity and the effect of such beliefs I leave to the scientists, who alone are competent to pass any judgment on them.

It is a known fact that women are better fitted to look after the growth of domesticated plants, by which I mean those plants and creepers yielding fruits and flowers used largely for household consumption, than men. Here it is worth considering for a while, a peculiar practice which was widely prevalent in primitive Tamil-land. Young girls were encouraged to tender the Nocci plant (five-leaved or three-leaved chaste tree with bluish flowers) which was generally grown for fencing a house. Young girls in a sportive mood or as a sort of hobby, carefully tended this tree at home. We get allusions to this practice in Ahatturai verses, (love literature), which treat of the wailings of the nurse at the elopement of her daughter. A girl had been very devotedly tending some Nocci trees grown in the courtyard of her house. She used to gambol under the shade of those Nocci trees. One day she had disappeared with her lover. Her mother could not contain her grief at the sight of those Nocci trees and her young playmates. She burst into tears:

Young girls and the Nocci.

“ ஐதே காமம் யானே யொய்யெனத்
தருமணன் ஞெமிரிய திருநகர் முற்றத்
தோரை யாயமு நொச்சியுங் காண்டொறு
நீர்வார் கண்ணேன் கலுழும்.” (Naṟṟiṇai-143)

“ தாங்குநின் னவல மென்றி ரதுமற்
றியாங்ஙன மொல்லு மோ வறிவுடை யீரே
யுள்ளி னுள்ளம் வேமே யுண்கண்
மணிவாழ் பாவை நடைகற் றன்னவெ
னணியியற் குறுமக ளாடிய
மணி யேர் நொச்சியுந் தெற்றியுங் கண்டே.”
(Naṟṟiṇai-184)

Whatever the tree might be, once it fell into the ambit of a girl's affections, it became a hot favourite for the rest of the family and was devotedly attended to and treated as an elder sister. A girl in a sportive mood casually thrust the seed of a Punnai tree (Mast-wood) into the sand. In a few days it sprouted and showed signs of healthy growth. The girl was much excited with elation to see the seed which she had cast into the sand shooting out with sprouts and she ever after lovingly fed it with ghee and milk. Her mother observed with satisfaction the child and the tree growing together and called it the elder sister of the girl: because what pleased her daughter pleased her also. Later, when she had grown up and had come of age, her lover happened once to indulge in love dalliance with the girl under the shade of that Punnai tree, as there was nobody present on that occasion. But the girl promptly stopped him in a hushed manner, saying that she felt shy to be familiar with him in the presence of that tree which she had adopted as her own sister and so wanted to repair with him to the shade of some other tree. This is beautifully set forth in the following poem:—

"விளையா டாயமொடு வெண்மணை லழுத்தி
மறந்தனந் துறந்த காழ்முளை யகைய
நெய்பெய் தீம்பால் பெய்தினிது வளர்ப்ப
நும்மினுஞ் சிறந்தது நுவ்வை யாகுமென்
றன்னை கூறினள் புன்னையது சிறப்பே
அம்ம நாணுது நும்மொடு நகையே
விருந்திற் பாணர் விளரிசை கடுப்ப
வலம்புரி வான்கோடு நரலு மிலங்குநீர்த்
துறைகெழு கொண்கநீ நல்கி
னிறைபடு நீழல் பிறவுமா ருளவே. (Narrinai–172)

This depicts fairly well the highly imaginative turn of mind and sensitiveness for which the Tamil girls are very much noted. Their love for green leaves and flowers has become really a craze, nay, a religion for themselves. Young girls in those days gracefully decked themselves with leaf garments and flowery girdles. Their shining in girdles, strung with Nocci flowers of the bluish tint, had impressed even poetesses like Veripāḍia Kāmakkaṉṉiār. The Nocci, as we have seen previously, is the three-leaved Chaste tree or Vitex Trifolia, and was worn by the soldiers when guarding a fort against the besieging forces.

> " நீரற வறியா நிலமுதற் கலந்த
> கருங்குர னொச்சிக் கண்ணார் குரூஉத்தழை
> மெல்லிழை மகளி ரைதக லல்குற்
> றொடலை யாகவுங் கண்டனம். "

(Puranānūru–271)

Mōsi Sāttanār also refers to the Nocci.

> " மணிதுணர்ந் தன்ன மாக்குர னொச்சி
> போதுவிரி பன்மர னுள்ளுஞ் சிறந்த
> காத னன்மர நீமற் றிசினே
> கடியுடை வியனகர்க் காண்வரப் பொலிந்த
> தொடியுடை மகளி ரல்குலுங் கிடத்தி
> காப்புடைப் புரிசை புக்குமா றழித்தலின்
> ஊர்ப்புறங் கொடாஅ நெடுந்தகை
> பீடுகெழு சென்னிக் கிழமையு நினதே. "

(Puranānūru-272)

[The best and dearest of the flora
Art thou, Nocci, with thy flowery sheaves
That blossom like the budding blue-stone!
Thou cover'st the laps of bangled girls

In bewitching splendour in mansions guarded,
And, when forts are hemm'd and walls boarded
Thou sitt'st on the worthy head
Of him who braves the fray and leaps to fend.]

**Women and the Mullai**

Young girls also reared up and fostered the Mouvval or Mullai (Arabian Jasmine) with the nocci tree, as is revealed by the following Akanānūru lines :-

"மௌவலொடு மலர்ந்த மாக்குர னொச்சியு
மவ்வரி யல்கு லாயமு முள்ளாள்
எதிலன் பொய்ம்மொழி நம்பி யேர்வினை
வளங்கெழு திருநகர் புலம்பப் போகி."

(Akanānūru–117)

In Sirupāṇārruppdai, the third of the Ten Songs, there occurs the following line: "முல்லை சான்ற கற்பின் மெல்லியல்." While annotating this, the commentator Naccinārkiniar says that Jasmine or Mullai was worn by paragons of virtue, as a symbol of chastity. This is corroborated by the following references also :

"வாளுத வரிவை முல்லை மலைய." (Ainkurunūru–408)
"முடிச்சூட்டு முல்லையோ முதற்கற்புமுல்லையோ.',
(Takkayagāpparaṇi–119)
"முல்லையந்தொடை யருந்ததி."
(Prapulinga Līlai-Kailāya–27)
"முல்லைசான்ற கற்பின்,மெல்லியற்குறு மகளுறைவினாரே."
(Akanānūru–274 and Narriṇai–142)

So Mullai became synonymous with Karpu or chastity. The word Mullai not only denotes chastity but its profusion, perfection or overabundance, what is called mikuti (மிகுதி) in Tamil,

From chastity, the word Mullai slowly came to signify the conjugal felicity which a husband derives from a virtuous wife who loves him truly and poems dealing with this kind of happiness which a husband enjoys in the company of his wife who is a pink of virtue, were brought under the theme-head of Mullai, as is found in Purapporuḷ Veṇbā Mālai. And from this the meaning of Mullai was still further broadened so that it began to embrace all kinds of perfections that are of a virtuous sort and thus we have got now Kār-Mullai, Thēr-Mullai, Illāṉ-Mullai, etc. The following stanza is an illustration under the theme Mullai, in Purapporuḷ Veṇbā Mālai :—

> " ஊதை புளர வொசிந்து மணங்கமழுங்
> கோதை போன் முல்லைக் கொடிமருங்குற்—பேதை
> குழைவ இ பிணைந்த குவிமுலை பாகன்
> கலை இக் கவின் விலம்."

From the commentary to the stanzu-75, of Takkayāgapparaṇi, we also learn that chaste women fostered the Jasmine creeper as a bounden duty and as a sign of their virtue. (" தேவி முல்லை வளர்த்தற்குக் காரணம் கற்புடைமை யென வுணர்க.") There it is stated that Kāḷi, the consort of Siva, was fostering a giant creeper of the Jasmine, whose tendrils had reached the moon.

> " நுதிக்கோடு கூர்கலை புகைப்பான் விடாமுல்லை
> நாளும் ... தொடர் ... ...
> மதிக்கோடு தைவர வெழுந்தன் கொழுநனை
> வாயா தெனக்கொண்டு மேயாது மாறுமிவே."

(Takkayāgapparaṇi-75)

So the breeding of the Mullai creeper and the wearing of its flowers were deemed as the infallible symbol of feminine purity. It was also known as இல் வளர் முல்லை (House-hold Mullai), as it was devoutly looked after by house-wives. And its maiden efflorescence was an affair of great jubilation with young girls. This joyous festival was celebrated with the beating of the timbrel.

" அல்லியங் கோதைமாத ரன்பொடு வளர்த்தமுல்லை
மெல்லரும் பீன்றதென்று விழாவயர் முழவி னோடு
மல்லலந் திணிதோண் மைந்தர் மங்கையர் வதுவையாற்றும்
பல்லிய முழக்க மார்க்கும் பரவையேயொடி கலுமாதோ."

(Naidatham)

The Festival of the First Florescence of the Jasmine was observed with the same solemnity as that of a girl coming of age, *i. e.*, attaining puberty. How this Jasmine was cherished dearly by young girls, is beautifully depicted in Jīvaka Chintāmaṇi. The Mullai creeper was fed with honeyed water by a young unmarried girl. It was sheltered by flowery garlands, to ward off the heat of the sun. The sand around it was covered by pearls and was hedged with gold. Its green tendrils were supported by coral rods. Its first florescence was greeted with great eclat, with the showering of costly presents to the first informants. The creeper was given a beautiful name and was fraternised as a beloved sister.

" கொய்தகைப் பொதுவிற்சோலைக் குழவிய முல்லை மௌவல்
செய்ய சந்திமயச் சாரற் கருப்புரக் கன்று நீம் பூக்
கைதரு மணியிற் றெண்ணீர் மதுக்கலந் தூட்டிமாலை
பெய்தொளி மறைத்து நங்கை பிறையென வளர்க்கின்றுளே.

பவழங்கொள் கோடுநாட்டிப் பைம்பொனின் வேலிகோலித்
தவழ் கதிர்முத்தம் பாய்த்தித் தன்கையாற் றீண்டி கன்னுட்
புகழ்கொடி நங்கைதன்பேர் பொறித்ததோர் கன்னிமுல்லை
யகழ் கடற்றுளை வேந்தே யணியெயிறீன்ற தன்றே.

வம்பலர் கோதை சிந்த மயிலெனவொருத்தி போடிக்
கொம்பலர் நங்கை பூத்தாள் பொலிகெனக் குனிந்தவிற்றிழ்
அம்பலர் கண்ணியார நிதியறைந் தோகை போக்கிக்
கம்பலம் போர்த்த போலுங் கடிமலர்க் காவு புக்காள்."

(Jivaka Chintāmaṇi-Padumaiyār
Ilampakam 1267–1269)

The entire extinction of this practice at the present day is hard to be explained; but it will be noted that it has given place to the worship of the sacred Basil. This practice was quite alien to the Tamil-land, though it was recognised even in those remote times that Tirumāl was pleased to wear a garland of the Basil green leaves. Anyhow, the worship of the sacred Basil by the women, who, by the by, form only a fragmentary portion of the womenfolk, has crept into the south from the north. It is evidently an Aryan custom and no shred of evidence is to be found in earliest times. Growing Basil within the house precincts is believed to keep away snakes and other poisonous reptiles. It is really a sign of purity and it possesses some medicinal properties.

**The Sacred Basil**

The ancient Tamils were possessed of the æsthetic sensibility in a remarkable degree and were great connoisseurs of the beauty and fragrance of flowers. We have seen how the village belles

**The Kāndal Flower.**

were entranced by the glowing beauty of the Vēngai flowers and burst into hilarious glee, giving vent to the inmost feelings of their hearts, as they were reminded of the affections of their sweet-hearts. Some beautiful and fragrant flowers, particularly the Kāndaḷ (Gloriosa Superba or Malabar glory lily, red specie) on the mountain side, were believed to have blossomed for the exclusive use of the gods and so the people did not touch or smell them. The ancients were struck with wonder at the colour, smell and beauty of some flowers and easily believed that they were the favourite resort of some deity or spirit.

So they were called divine flowers. Thus we find the Kāndaḷ being called, " Kaḍavuṭ Kāndaḷ ", *i. e.,* divine Kāndaḷ.

> " சோலை படுக்கத்துச் சுரும்புண விரிந்த
> கடவுட் காந்த ளுள்ளும் பலவுடன்
> இறும்பூது கஞலிய ஆய்மலர்."

(Akanānūru–152)

In mountainous regions Kuvaḷai or the Purple Indian water-lily flowers that grow in the sacred springs would be left unplucked for it was thought that the sylvan nymphs or fairies would want them to decorate their tresses together with the blood-red kāndaḷ. Wearing these flowers which lent a horrid charm to their graceful figures, the fairies were said to dance in hilly sides where the rushing cataracts provided the back-ground music.

" கடவுட் கற்சுனை யடையிறந் தவிழ்ந்த
பறியாக் குவளை மலரொடு காந்தட்
குருதி யொண்பூ வுருகெழக் கட்டிப்
பெருவரை யடுக்கம் பொற்பச் சூர்மகள்
அருவி யின்னியத் தாடும்." (Naṟṟiṇai-34)

God Muruga was said to have a peculiar fascination for the kāndaḷ flower. He was very fond of wearing chaplets of the red kāndaḷ, fresh and honeyed which the bees would not touch.

" சுரும்பு மூசாச் சுடர்ப்பூங் காந்தட்
பெருந்தண் கண்ணி மிலைந்த சென்னியன்."
(Tirumurugāṟṟuppaḍai 43-44)

Hence the kāndaḷ was adored as the emblem of Lord Muruga who was supposed to have worn the kāndaḷ on his head when he waged war against the Asuras. So the kings also wore this kāndaḷ when going to war, as a potent charm that would bring sure victory.

" குருகு பெயரிய குன்றெறிந் தானு
முருகெழு காந்தண் மலைந்தான் —பொருகழற்
கார் கருதி வார்முரச மார்க்குங் கடற்றானைப்
போர் கருதி யார்மலையார் பூ."
(Purapporuḷ Veṇbā Mālai 103)

At Puhār there were sacred gardens and parks, well guarded by kings. It was believed that during the season of the Festival of Indra, devas and other celestial beings would be visiting those spots. So earthly beings would avoid those shady groves which were guarded

Sacred Groves.

as divine reserves by the king's men. The trees there were supposed to bloom with wreaths of unfading flowers which even the bees would not touch. It was thought that a ferocious fury or demon was guarding those gardens, holding a death-dealing cord in its hand. So prudence forced human beings to shun those reserves. There were also two woods called Sambāthi Vanam and Kavēra Vanam, adjoining the city of Puhār, which were believed to be haunted by dangerous goddesses who smote men with their loving touch. These spirits were called Tākkaṇangu. Indeed these wooded groves which had not been tread by the feet of man, inspired a reverential awe and kindled the fancy of the ancients into a raging flame. Those bowery groves were ideal places; the quiet beauty of that shut-in world, the colour of its flowers, the green of its grass and trees, came as a bright glimpse of heaven to the wonder-struck ancestors of the Tamil land. In that fair domain of giant shadows lent by cloud-kissing trees, smiling with gorgeous flowers of saint-smashing fragrance, one could fancy the frivolous, frail-hearted ghosts and fairies shrinking aside, stopping their dances and laughter to stare at any straggler transgressing those deserted bounds.

> "பன்மல ரடுக்கிய நன்மரப் பந்த
> ரிலவந் திகையி னெயிற் புறம் போகி
> னுலக மன்னவ னுழையோ ராங்குளர்
> விண்ணவர் கோமான் விழாக்கொ ணன்னாண்
> மண்ணவர் விழையார் வானவ ரல்லது
> பாடுவண் டிமிரா பன்மரம் யாவையும்
> வாடா மாமலர் மாலைகள் தூக்கலிற்

கைபெய் பாசத்துப் பூதங் காக்குமென்
றுய்யா னத்திடை யுணர்ந்தோர் செல்லார்
வெங்கதிர் வெம்மையின் விரிசிறை யிழந்த
சம்பாதி யிருந்த சம்பாதி வனமுந்
தவாநீர்க் காவிரிப் பாவைதன் தாதை
கவேர னிருந்த கவேர வனமும்
மூப்புடை முதுமைய தாக்கணங் குடைய."

(Maṇimēkalai III 44-57)

Sambāthy Vanam takes its name after Sambāthy, the elder brother of Jaṭāyu, the mighty eagle and according to the legend, he fell in that forest, his wings being burnt by the wrath of the sun-god. This Sambāthy–Vanam is now known as Puḷḷirukku Vēḷūr or Vaithēēsvarankōil, which was a suburb of Kāviripūmpaṭṭinam in those days. About 1800 years ago this Puhār or Kāviripūmpaṭṭinam was submerged by the rising of the sea.

Travellers passing by flowery groves, worshipped them as a sanctorium haunted by ethereal beings. The poor folk thought perhaps that they would incur the displeasure of the wood-land gods if they failed to pay their humble obeisance while they passed that way.

"பன்மலர் நறும்பொழில் பழிச்சி"

(Naṟṟiṇai–398)

Flowery gardens, thick–set woods and blooming river-beds were also worshipped as the natural seat or abode of Muruga.

"காடுங் காவுங் கவின்பெறு துருத்தியும்"

(Tirumurugāṟṟupaḍai–223)

Woods, forests and deserts were worshipped as the temple of Durga, who is known as Kānamar Selvi, i.e., Goddess of the Forest.

"கானமர் செல்வி மருளின்." (Akanānūru-345)

Some forests were also named after this Goddess. One such forest was Vindāḍavi or the Forest of Vindai, another name for goddess Durga.

"கடவுட் பெயரிய கானமொடு"
(Pathiṟṟupattu-88)

It was not all the flowers as a specie, that were exclusively reserved for the gods but only some flowers at a particular spot that were supposed to be monopolised by the gods. As the Kānḍaḷ flowers on the Nēri mountain were believed to be haunted by some fierce spirit, it was thought that even bees would not approach them to have their honey and that if by mistake any bee were to go near it and thereby defile its sanctity, it would certainly incur the displeasure of the deity and so would be afflicted. It would cease flying and humming from that time, a hard scourge indeed for its sin of pollution.

"மலர்ந்த காந்தள் மாறூ தூதிய
கடும்பறைத் தும்பி சூர்நசைத் தாஅய்ப்
பறை பண் ணழியும் பாடுசா னெடுவரை."
(Pathiṟṟupattu-67)

The commentator Naccinārkiniar interprets the lines 189 to 191 of Malaipaḍukaḍām as follows:— As the gods are very fond of the kuvaḷai flowers

(water-lily), even if you get near those fragrant blossoms or try to snatch a peep into the bowers of the houries of the hills, you will quiver with awe and fear. So do not loiter in those places.'' This is a warning given to some way-farers, who were strangers to the Naviram hills, through which they had to pass. So the shady trees and scented flowers in the heart of the dense woods on mountain slopes were deemed to be the privileged retreats of gods who were imagined to pass their time pleasurably amidst the trees and flowers in that sylvan paradise, and hence a taboo was imposed on mankind. They were not to have even a peep into those mysterious places.

" நிறையிதழ்க் குவளை கடிவீ தொடினும்
வரையர மகளிர் இருக்கை காணினும்
உயிர்செல வெம்பிப் பனித்தலு முரியிர்."

(Malaipadu Kadām 189–191)

The mountain spirits were supposed to wear luminous flowers and haunt the vicinity of the mountain, assuming various forms, as suited to their fancy.

" குன்றுடைச் சிலம்பிற் சுடர்ப்பூ வேய்ந்து
தாம் வேண் டுருவி னணங்குமார் வருமே."

(Akanānūru–158)

**Lotus Flowers**

Lotus flowers in some sacred tanks were believed to have blossomed for gods to wear which human beings were prohibited from even touching. So it was thought improper for anybody to pluck those flowers. These red lotus flowers, blossoming like fire in water,

were sacred and had divine powers. So in some tanks all the lotus flowers were dedicated to gods and people were forbidden from removing them.

"நீத்துடை நெடுங்கயம் தீப்பட மலர்ந்த
கடவு ளொண்பூ வடைத லோம்பி."

(Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaḍai 289–291)

"கடவுட் கயத்தமன்ற சுடரிதழ்த் தாமரை"

(Maduraikānchi–710)

"தெய்வத் தாமரை." (Sirupāṇāṟṟuppaḍai–73)

There is a story connected with the name of Vellore, as is referred to in the commentary of Sirupāṇāṟṟupadai. It is said that king Nalliakkōḍan was once attacked by his enemy's forces. He prayed to Muruga. Muruga asked him to pluck a flower from a tank and use it against his enemies. When the king plucked a flower, to his great amazement he found it transformed into a vēl or javelin and with that mighty divine weapon, Nalliakkōḍan defeated his enemies. From that time that place where the tank was standing, was known as Vēlūr.

"திறல்வே லுதியிற் பூத்த கேணி
விறல் வேல் வென்றி வேலூர்."

(Sirupāṇāṟṟupaḍai 172–173)

God Muruga is said to dwell, among other places, in woods and groves, river-beds, tanks, junctions of three, four or five streets, on Kaḍambu trees blossoming with new flowers, on trees standing at the centre of a hamlet whose shade the people sought for rest and shelter, in pothiyil (public places) and in the pillars called Kanthu against which the cattle rub their backs.

" காடுங் காவுங் கவின்பெறு துருத்தியும்
யாறுங் குளனும் வேறுபல் வைப்புஞ்
சதுக்கமுஞ் சந்தியும் புதுப்பூங் கடம்பும்
மன்றமும் பொதியிலுங் கந்துடை நிலையினும்."

(Tirumurugāṛṛupaḍai 223–226)

In the same way, even Tirumāl is said to dwell with different names on shady banian trees whose tender leaves resemble fire, newly-blossomed kaḍambu trees, river-beds, hills and such other places.

" அழல்புரை குழைகொழு நிழறரும் பலசினை
ஆலமுங் கடம்பு நல்யாற்று நடுவும்
கால் வழக் கறுநிலைக் குன்றமும் பிறவும்
அவ்வவை மேய வேறுவேறு பெயரோய்."

(Paripāḍal IV 66-69)

It is also said that Muruga was born on a lotus flower.

" நளினத்துப் பிறவியை." (Paripāḍal V Line 12)

" பயந் தோ ரென்ப பதுமத்துப் பாயல்." (do. Line 49)

" நின்னீன்ற நிரையிதழ்த் தாமரை."

(Paripāḍal VIII Line–13)

The red lotus is worshipped as the divine seat of the goddess Thirumagaḷ (Lakshmi) and the white lotus as the divine seat of the goddess Kalaimagaḷ (Saraswati). So lotus flowers are called Deivathāmarai.

" தெய்வத் தாமரை." (Sirupāṇāṛṛuppaḍai–73)

Thirumagaḷ, the goddess of Fortune is usually depicted as seated on a red lotus with an elephant

on either side offering flower and water. A beautifully blossomed Vēngai tree standing in the midst of two mountains, bathed by waters falling from either side, has been compared to Gaja-Lakshmi.

" கதிர்விரி கனைசுடர்க் கவின்கொண்ட நனஞ்சாரல்
எதிரெதிர் ஓங்கிய மால்வரை யடுக்கத்
ததிரிசை யருவிதன் னஞ்சினை மிசை வீழ
முதிரிணர் ஊழ்கொண்ட முழவுத்தா ளெரிவேங்கை
வரிநுத லெழில் வேழம் பூநீர்மேற் சொரிதரப்
புரிநெகிழ் தாமரை மலரங்கண் வீறெய்தித்
திருநயந் திருந்தன்ன தேங்கமழ் விறல் வெற்ப."

(Kalitogai-44)

Even on stones that are laid over the door-frames of houses they used to carve the image of Thirumagaḷ with she-elephants and purple Indian water-lilies on either side; for door-steps and door-frames are believed to be the seat of Thirumagaḷ. (Vide Naccinārkiniar's commentary—Neḍunalvāḍai lines 81–86.)

" நடுவே திருவும் இரண்டு புறத்தும் இரண்டு செங்கழுநீர்ப்
பூவும் இரண்டு பிடியுமாக வகுத்த உத்தரக் கற்கவி."

The Purāṇic story of Seruthuṇai Nāyanār, cutting the nose of the queen of the Pallava King, Kaḻarchinga Nāyanār, for smelling a flower reserved for the use of the God of Tiruvārūr, and the Pallava king himself cutting her hand that picked up that flower, is only an extreme instance of the faith which the Tamils had in respect of certain flowers to which the gods had the first and the exclusive right to wear and otherwise use as they pleased. (Vide Periapurāṇam by Sēkkiḻār)

Lord Siva is said to wear the blossoms of the Erukku, Yarcum or madar (calotropis gigantea) which are not liked by anybody among gods or men. When a pious devotee offers the flower of the Erukku, God willingly accepts and wears the same, though it is not a worthy one. Mention is made about this in Purananūru :—

**The Erukku Flower**

" நல்லவுந் தீயவு மல்ல குவிஇணர்ப்
புல்லிலை யெருக்க மாயினு முடையவை
கடவுள் பேணே மென்னா." (Purananūru-106)

**Kāvan Maram, the Protected Trees**

Every Tàmil king reared up a tree of his own, called kaḍimaram or ' kāvan-maram ' and zealously guarded it, as if it were his own life. Sometimes a whole grove was reserved as sacred and guarded by the king's men. A king invading his enemy's territory, first took particular care to take possession of this guarded tree or grove found in the enemy's country and destroy it by tying his elephants. The exact significance of this practice has not been well clarified. Perhaps they thought during those times that such guarded trees gave power and pelf to the king who owned them and cherished dearly.

It may not be out of place to examine here the Puranic story of Muruga destroying the mango tree that was standing inside the mid-ocean. According to one version of the story, Sūrapadma, the Asura enemy of Muruga, took the shape of a mango tree and hid himself in the sea, which

Muruga, the All-Seeing, detected and destroyed at once. But according to Naccinārkiniar, the commentator of Tirumurugāṟṟupaḍai, Muruga came to know of the existence of a mango tree, whose clusters of flowers were inclined downwards. It was a magical tree which deprived the enemies of the Asuras of half their strength and added it to the might of the Asuras. So Muruga first cut that tree with his spear. Another commentator to Tirumurugāṟṟupaḍai (whose identity is not known excepting that he was called Uraiāsiriyar) says that the mango tree standing in the sea was a foreboding tree assisting the Asuras and that signified defeat to them by drooping down its clusters of flowers. As it was a source of help to the Asuras, Muruga first destroyed that mango tree.

> "வரைமருள் புணரி வான்பிசி ருடைய
> வளிபாய்ந் தட்ட துளங்கிருங் கமஞ்சூ
> லளிபிரும் பரப்பின் மாக்கடன் முன்னி
> யணங்குடை யவுண ரேமம் புணர்க்குஞ்
> சூருடை முழுமுதல் தடிந்த பேரிசைக்
> கடுஞ்சின விறல் வேள் களிறூர்ந் தாங்கு."

(Pathiṟṟuppattu–II–(1)

> "அவுணர் நல்வல மடங்கக் கவிழிணர்
> மாமுதல் தடிந்த மறுவில் கொற்றத்
> தெய்யா நல்லிசைச் செவ்வேற் சேஎய்."

(Tirumurugāṟṟupaḍai–59–61)

From all these various versions one may plausibly draw out the truth that sacred trees were held by kings as a source of support to them and as trees of oracles which predicted good and bad.

So the enemy of a king first took very good care to cut and destroy those trees. Hence these trees came to be well guarded and preserved. This is seen by their very name Kāvan-maram or Guarded-Trees.

Nannan was a Tamil prince and his capital was Pāḻi, a well-guarded city. (Akanānūru–15). He was keeping a mango tree as his sacred and protected one. According to Kuruntogai–73, the Kōsars, a ferocious band of war-like myrmidons, destroyed that mango tree by a stratagem. The nature of the strategy or the cause for the war is not revealed.

> "Nannan, Naṟu mā Konṟu naṭṭiṟ pōkkia
> Onṟu moḻik Kōsar pōla
> Vankaṭ cūḻccium vēṇḍumāṟ cirite."
>
> (Kuruntogai–73)

Perhaps this mango tree of Nannan was standing by the side of a river in a well-preserved garden. Once a mango-fruit from this sacred tree fell into the river and was carried by the current. A young girl, taking bath at a distance, noticed this. She naturally took that fruit and ate it. But she was caught in the act of eating that rare and inviolable fruit and brought before Nannan. Nannan flew into a rage and passed a sentence of death for the crime, on that unfortunate girl. Her parents to whom she was the darling, implored the king to commute the sentence for eighty-one male elephants and gold weighing equal to her weight.

But Nannan was inexorable and that young girl was executed for no crime than that of taking a mango which was brought to her side by the flowing water of the river. Even the people of his day were shocked to hear about this and his action was cried down as most inhuman and cruel. Bards and poets forsook his court and he and his descendants were looked down with contempt. When he died, he was believed to have been thrown into hell only.

" Maṇṇiya cenṟa oṇṇuthal arivai
Punal taru pasuṅkāi thinṟathan thappaṟku
Onpathiṟṟonpathu kaḷiṟṟoḍavaḷ niṟai
Poncey pāvai koḍuppavum koḷḷān
Peṇkolāi purintha Nannan pōla
Varaiyā niraiyattuc celīaro." (Kuruntogai-262)

We are led to believe that this episode ought to have been the cause for the destruction of the mango tree itself by the war-like Kōsars who were famous for the successful fulfilment of their vows. They were heroes of one word and of iron resolution. Perhaps they took a punitive expedition into Nannan's territory to chastise him for his atrocious and unpardonable sin of killing an innocent girl. These Kōsars hailed from the Tuḷu country as is stated in Akanānūru–15.

Mr. R. Ragava Iyengar has got something to say on this. According to him, Nannan was very much devoted to a mango tree for he had heard that its fruit had the property of imparting longe-

vity to him who ate it. So he zealously guarded it by employing watchmen and cherished it dearly. But due to the violent blowing of the wind a mango had fallen into the river, unnoticed by the guardsmen, which the girl snatched and tasted, instead of handing it over to the king. When the Kōsars heard of the inhuman punishment dealt out to the girl, they took a vow to destroy that mango tree itself, whose one mango had wrought the death of a girl. They hatched a plot to fulfil their vow. They sent some female bards (Akavan Makaḷir) to Akuthai Tanthai (the father of Akuthai) and got some female elephants as a present to them, as is alluded to in kuruntogai—298.

" இன்கடுங் கள்ளி னகுதை தந்தை
வெண்கடைச் சிறுகோ லகவன் மகளிர்
மடப்பிடிப் பரிசின் மானப்
பிறிதொன்று குறித்தவ னெடும்புற நிலையே."

This is the authority cited by the learned commentator; it is said that the female bards got a present of elephants not for themselves but for a different purpose, but what was that other purpose is not stated in the verse quoted above. There is no other reference in it to either the Kōsars or the mango tree. But any how Mr. Ragava Iyengar has chosen to link this allusion to the one in Kuruntogai-262. The elephants thus got, were tied to the mango tree, in the absence of Nannan and needless to say, the tree was broken and uprooted by the elephants. The tree, thus fallen was hewn for fuel by the peasants of the country-

side and carried away; this was the stratagem employed by the Kōsars to destroy the mango tree. It is said, that by this the Kōsars also wanted to see whether Nannan would put to death all the female-bards who tied the elephants to the tree. This is highly fanciful for the girl got only death and not life by the mango.

But the belief that the fruits of certain trees had the property of giving long life was prevalent in those days. We read in Puranānūru of how Athikamān, came into possession of the fruit of an Emblic myrobalan (Nelli) fetched from the top of a mountain and presented it to the venerable Tamil poetess Avvaiyār, as he wanted her to live for a very long time, instead of eating it himself.

"...................................தொன்னிலைப்
பெருமலை விடரகத் தருமிசைக் கொண்ட
சிறியிலை நெல்லித் தீங்கனி குறியா
தாத னின்னகத் தடக்கிச்
சாத னீங்க வெமக்கீத் தனையே."

(Puranānūru–91)

Tithian, a ruling prince or Vēḷ, was cherishing a Punnai tree (the Mast-wood) as his sacred protected tree. The tree was standing at Kurukkai. Anni, another Vēḷ, had a long—standing grudge against Tithian. There is a place called Annikuḍi to this day, near Māyavaram. This was Anni's residence. One day he proceeded to destroy the Punnai of Tithian. Evvi, the Vēḷ of Vaippūr, getting scent of this, interceded and admonished

him not to provoke a war in such a rash manner with Tithian. His words fell on deaf ears Anni marched straight to Kurukkai. The Punnai was seen standing in full bloom and in the war that ensued between Anni and Tithian, the Punnai was hacked to pieces.

Mr. A. Narayanasamy Iyer, the commentator of Naṟṟiṇai, has identified this Kurukkai with that which is found near Nandipuraviṇṇakaram or Nāthan koil. But Tithian's Kurukkai can rightly be said to be that which is situated near Tiruthuraipūṇḍi. There one can find a streatch of land, about 2 squire miles of elevated ground, lying uncultivated. It is covered with Punnai trees. This can be seen even to-day. There are two ruined Siva temples signifying that the site was once a flourishing city. After the destruction of that sacred Punnai tree at that famous battle of Kurukkai, that city also was ruined and to this day the place is wearing a sombre and desolate appearance. There are many shrines of Aiyanārs. These Aiyanārs represent only the hero-stones installed in memory of the heroes who fell in that famous battle of Kurukkai. Many of those Aiyanārs have got the significant name of Sirai-mēṭṭār (Deliverer of captives). A glance at the place will convince us that it ought to have been the Kurukkai referred to in the Sangam works, as belonging to Tithian. There are a large number of springs or pools at the spot. The presence of the Punnai trees and its deserted appearance will remove the last shadow of doubt regarding the identity of the place.

"அன்னி குறுக்கைப் பறந்தலைத் திதியன்
தொன்னிலை முழுமுதல் துமியப் பண்ணிப்
புன்னை குறைத்த ஞான்றை வயிரியர்
இன்னிசை யார்ப்பினும் பெரிதே." (Akanānūru-45)

"அன்னி குறுக்கைப் பறந்தலைத் திதியன்
தொன்னிலை முழுமுதல் துமியப் பண்ணிய
நன்னர் மெல்லிணர்ப் புன்னை." (Akanānūru-245)

"பயங்கெழு வைப்பிற் பல்வேல் எவ்வி
நயம்புரி நன்மொழி யடக்கவு மடங்கான்
பொன்னிணர் நறுமலர்ப் புன்னை வெஃகித்
திதியனொடு பொருத வன்னி போல
விளிகுவை." (Akanānūru-126)

"அன்னியும் பெரிய னவனும் விழுமிய
விருபெரு வேந்தர் பொருகளத் தொழித்த
புன்னை விழுமம் போல." (Naṟṟiṇai-180)

From these allusions we understand that the Punnai of Tithian was standing from the very ancient times and Anni was mad after taking hold of that tree and in that wild attempt he laid down his life.

In Puranānūru-23, poet Kallāḍanār says that the Pāṇḍyan king, Neḍuncheiḻyan, the Hero of Talaiyālankānam, cut with his axe all the protected trees that stood in every town of his enemy's territory. From this we can infer that every town had protected trees in those times in the Tamil country.

"Vaḍi navil naviyam pāithalin ūrthorum
Kaḍi maram tuḷaṅkia kāvum."
(Puranānūru-23)

Once Chōḷan Kuḷamuṟṟattu-Tuñcia Kiḷḷi Vaḷavan besieged the city of Karuvūr, the capital of the Chēra king. Karuvūr was a beautifully laid-out city, whose walls were washed by the crystal waters of Ān-Porunai. Fragrant groves with lustrous flowers and protected trees were smiling on either bank of the river, on whose stainless sands young girls played and gambolled in groups. Getting scent of the siege, the Chēra king in great fear shut himself within the city fort and did not stir out to give battle to the invader. The Chōḷa straightaway proceeded to cut all the protected trees in the groves of the Chēra king. In spite of all the alarming cries and the crash of the trees, the white-livered Chēra did not dare to make his appearance and resist. Ālattūr Kiḻār, in a nice little poem admonished the Chōḷa not to wage any war with that coward of a king.

" Aḍunai yāyinum viḍunai yāyinum
Ni aḷanthariṭhi nin puraimai vārkōṟ
Çeriari-c cilambiṟ kurunthoḍi makaḷir
Polamcey kaḻaṅgiṟ teṟṟiyāḍum
Taṇṇān Porunai veṇmaṇal citaiya-k
Karuṅkai-k kollan arañcey yavvāī
Neḍuṅkai naviyam pāithalin ṇilaiyaḻinthu
Vee kamaḻ neḍuñ cinai pulamba-k kāvutorum
Kaḍi maram taḍiyum ōcai tannūr
Neḍu matil varaippiṟ kaḍi manai iyamba
Āṅginitiruntha vēnthanoḍīngu nin
Cilaittār murasam kaṟaṅga
Malaittanai enbatu nāṇuttaka vuḍaittē.
(Puranānūru-26)

This illustrates the ancient practice of felling down the protected trees as a challenge to the enemy to give battle. The poet Kārikkaṇṇanār of Kāvirippūmpaṭṭinam advised Pāṇḍyan Ilavantikaippaḷḷi Tuñciya Nanmāran not to cut the protected trees of his enemies as they were not strong enough even to serve as pillars for tying his mighty elephants.

" Onnār-c-cekuppinum cekukka ennathōōm
Kaḍimaram taḍital ōmbu nin
Neḍu nal yānaikku-k kanthāṟṟāvē. "
(Purananūru–57)

It was considered as unmitigated shame and degradation for one's heroism if another's elephant was tied to his protected tree. It was the practice for a victorious king to tie his elephants to his enemy's protected trees and then destroy them. We also read of one poet Peruñcitranār, who taught Prince Veḷimān a lesson on the virtue of liberality by tying to his protected tree a huge elephant which he got as a present from the great Kumaṇan.

" Iravalar puravalai nīyum allai
Puravalar iravalar-k killaiyum allar
Iravalar uṇmaiyum kāṇini ninnūr-k
Kaḍimaram varuntha-t taṇtu yām piṇitta
Neḍunal yānai em paricil
Kaḍumān tōnṟaḷ celval yānē. "
(Purananūru–162)

Tying an elephant to the enemy's sacred and protected tree was the consummation of a glorious

and clear victory. This is clearly expressed in Pathiṟṟuppattu—IV–3.

The owner of the tree would guard it as his cherished life, with all the force under his command. The capture of the guarded tree by the enemy was construed as a catastrophe. The guarding troops would lay down their lives rather than forsake the tree. The falling of the tree into enemy's hands was deemed also as a public calamity. Even kings who waged wars for the hand of princess, were said to have victoriously tied their elephants to the protected trees.

"Vēṭṭa vēnthanum venchinattinanē
Kaḍavana kaḻippivaḷ tandaiyum ceyyān
Oḷiru mukattēntia veengu toḍi maruppiṟ
Kaḻiru kaḍimaram cērā cērntha
Oliru vēl maravarum vāimūḻttanarē
Iyavarum ariyā-p palliyam karanga
Annō, perumpētu uṟṟanḍṟu ivvarunkaḍi
mūtūr."
(Puranānūru–336)

Any tree might happen to be the sacred protected tree of a king. The kings were proud of making their war-drums from the wood sliced from the protected trees in the groves of their enemies which they destroyed in war. The Kaḍambu tree, (a sea-side Indian Oak) was held by a chief, Kaḻuvuḷ by name, in an island in the west coast, as his guarded tree. Imayavaramban Neḍunchēralātan, an ancient Chēra king, led a naval expedition against Kaḻuvuḷ and bombarded his island fortress.

The protected tree of Kadambu was zealously guarded by the defenders. But Imayavaramban overcame all resistance, hewed that Kadamba tree and caused a war-drum to be made out of its wood. This glorious achievement of Imayavaramban is commemorated both in Pathirruppattu and Silappadikāram.

> " துளங்கு பிசிருடைய மாக்கட னீக்கிக்
> கடம்பறுத் தியற்றிய வலம்படு வியன் பணை."
>
> (Pathirrupattu–II–7)

> " துளங்கிருங் குட்டந் தொலைய வேலிட்
> டணங் குடைக் கடம்பின் முழுமுதல் தடிந்து
> பொருமுர ணெய்திய கழுவுள் புறம்பெற்று."
>
> (Pathirrupattu–II–8)

> " செவ்வா யெஃகம் விலங்குந ரறுப்ப
> வருநிறந் திறந்த புண்ணுமிழ் குருதியின்
> மணிநிற விருங்கழி நீர் நிறம் பெயர்ந்து
> மனாலக் கலவை போல அரண்கொன்று
> முரண்மிகு சிறப்பி னுயர்ந்த ஊக்கலை
> பலர்மொசிந் தோம்பிய திரள்பூங் கடம்பின்
> கடியுடை முழுமுதல் துமிய வேஎய்
> வென்றெறி முழங்குபணை செய்த வெல்போர்
> நாரரி நறவி னார மார்பிற்
> போரடு தானைச் சேர லாத."
>
> (Pathirrupattu–II–(1))

> " கடம்பு முதல் தடிந்த கடுஞ்சின வேந்தே."
>
> (Pathirrupattu–II–(2))

The drum made out of this Kadambu tree must have been a very big one for it seemed to have produced an uproarious resounding noise when played upon.

" சால்பெருந் தானைச் சேரலாதன்
மால் கட லோட்டிக் கடம்பறுத்தியற்றிய
பண்ணமை முரசின் கண்ணதிர்ந் தன்ன
கவ்வை." (Akanānūru–347)

" வலம்படு முரசிற் சேரலாதன்
முந்நீ ரோட்டிக் கடம்பறுத்து."
(Akanānūru–127)

" நுங்கோ யாரென வினவி னெங்கோ
விருமுந்நீர்த் துருத்தியுள்
முரணியோர்த் தலைச்சென்று
கடம்புமுதல் தடிந்த கடுஞ்சின முன்பின்
நெடுஞ் சேரலாதன்." (Pathirrupattu–II-(20))

This brilliant victory of Imayavaramban was claimed as a renowned family tradition and thus the term Destroyer of Kaḍambu, became a hereditary family title of all the Chēra kings. So all the successors of Imayavaramban and their lineage were also credited with the fame of destroying the Kaḍambu, whereas it was only Imayavaramban who achieved that unique success.

" மாநீர் வேலிக் கடம்பெறிந் திமயத்து
வானவர் மருள மலைவிற் பூட்டிய
வானவர் தோன்றல் வாய்வாட் கோதை."
(Silappadikāram–XXV)

" கடற்கடம் பெறிந்த காவல னாயினும்."
(Silappadikāram–XXVIII)

This eventful and unforgettable expedition into the sea-island which ended in the destruction of that protected tree of Kaḍambu provided some of the happiest moments of popular rejoicings and

even young girls in their games, while playing on their swings, or pounding millet, sang proudly of this thrilling victory.

> " கடம்பு முதல்தடிந்த காவலனைப் பாடிக்
> குடங்கை நெடுங் கண்பிறழ வாடாமோ வூசல்."
> " கடந்தடுதார்ச் சேரன் கடம்பெறிந்த வார்த்தை
> படர்ந்த நிலம் போர்த்த பாடலே பாடல்."
>
> (Silappadikāram–XXIX)

This Kaḍambu tree which was destroyed by Imayavaramban was said to be young always and never grew old. The commentator Aḍiyārkunallār says that this Kaḍambu possessed vicious and treacherous properties and so was standing without any change. His words are:

> " வஞ்சத்தால் நிற்கின்ற தாகலின், மூப்பின்றி
> ஒருநாள் போல நின்ற கடம்பு."

This is the one solitary instance wherein we get this idea. Anyhow we can infer from this that this Kaḍambu was a supernatural tree and Imayavaramban had to remove that tree as it spelt disaster to the peace of his state. That is also the reason why this tree has been called Aṇaṅguḍai-k-Kaḍambu in Pathiṟṟuppattu–IX–8.

> " முந்நீரி னுள்புக்கு மூவாக் கடம்பெறிந்தான்
> மன்னர் கோச் சேரன் வளவஞ்சி வாழ்வேந்தன்."
>
> (Silappadikāram–XVII)

Paḻaiyan, the king of Mōhūr, held a neem tree as his protected one. When Seṅkuṭṭuvan defeated him, he cut that tree into pieces and carried them

home on carts to make drums out of them. The carts were drawn by elephants and the ropes for the carts were spun out of the hair, removed from the heads of the wives of Paḻaiyan.

" மோகூர் மன்னன் முரசங் கொண்டு
நெடுமொழி பணித்தவன் வேம்புமுதல் தடிந்து
முரசுசெய முரச்சிக் களிறுபல பூட்டி
யொழுகை யுய்த்த." (Pathiṟṟupattu–V–4)

" கருஞ்சினை விறல்வேம் பறுத்த
பெருஞ்சினக் குட்டுவன்." (Pathiṟṟupattu–V–9)

" பழையன் காக்குங் கருஞ்சினை வேம்பின்
முரணை முழுமுதல் துமியப் பண்ணி
வாலிழை கழித்த நறும்பல் பெண்டிர்
பல்லிருங் கூந்தன் முரற்சியாற்
குஞ்சர வொழுகை பூட்டி "
(Pathiṟṟupattu–V–Patikam)

That margosa tree of Paḻaiyan must have been of gigantic size as to require elephants to draw its wood. It is said to have had a flourishing growth of leaves and tall thick branches.

" பழையன் காக்குங் குழைபயில் நெடுங்கோட்டு
வேம்புமுதல் தடிந்த வேந்துவாள் வலத்துப்
போந்தைக் கண்ணிப் பொறைய."
(Silappadikāram–XXVII)

This kind of tree worship is universally found all over the world. To give only but one instance, the Lithuanians revered remarkable oaks and other great shady trees, from which they received oracular responses. Some of them maintained

holy groves about their villages or houses, where even to break a twig would have been a sin. Apart from the bare evidence of the existence of the Kāvanmaram or protected trees and the anxious determination of the enemies regarding their destruction, we are not able to glean anything more concerning the object and the manner of worshipping them.

The Unnam Tree.

The shade of the cotton-wood, the greatest tree in the valley of the Upper Missouri, is supposed to possess an intelligence which, if properly approached, may help the Red Indians in certain undertakings. The silk-cotton trees which rear their enormous trunks to a stupendous height, far out-topping all the other trees of the forest, are regarded with reverence throughout West Africa, from the Senegal to the Niger, and are believed to be the abode of a god or spirit. Among the Ewe-speaking peoples of the Slave-coast, the indwelling god of this giant of the forest goes by the name of Huntin. Trees in which he especially dwells—for it is not every silk-cotton tree that he thus honours—are surrounded by a girdle of palm-leaves; and sacrifices of fowls are laid against the foot of the tree. A tree marked by such a girdle of palm-leaves may not be cut down or injured in any way; and even silk-cotton trees which are not supposed to be animated by Huntin, may not be felled unless the woodman first offers a sacrifice of fowls and palm-oil to purge himself of the proposed sacrilege.

This worship of the silk-cotton tree in other parts of the globe resembles a strange and unique custom practised in the ancient Tamil country. This is the practice of worshipping the Unnam tree, which in olden times was invoked for granting blessings and good omens for kings proceeding to the battle-field. The Tamil scholars and commentators have not yet rightly identified this tree. In Malabar the silk-cotton tree, Ilavam, is called Unnam. Whereas the Tamils have forgotten now about the very identity of the Unnam tree, it is gratifying to note that Malayāḷam, an off-shoot of Tamil, has preserved that term and has applied that to the silk-cotton tree. But the Unnam tree, revered by the ancient Tamilians, must have been a different one, for it has been described as a small tree with small leaves and yellow-coloured flowers, whereas the silk-cotton or Ilavam tree is a big one with red flowers. In Tolkāppiam, Poruḷathikāram, Sutram 60, we come across the line,

"Ōdā uḍal vēnthaḍukkia unna nilaiyum."

Naccinārkiniar, in his commentary says, that it was the custom to worship the Unnam tree for giving victory to a king. This tree was devotedly revered for its unfailing prophetic attributes. The king or his people in times of war appealed to this tree to bloom in emerald verdure and umbrage, as a token of victory to the king.

"முன்னங் குழையவுங் கோடெலா மொய்தளிரீன்
றுன்னங் குழையொலித் தோங்குவாய்—மன்னரைக்
கொன்று களங்கொள்ளுங் கொல்யானை வேந்தனை
வென்று களங் கொள்ளு மேல் வேந்து."

(Naccinārkiniar's commentary)

Another poet calls upon the Unnam tree to shoot forth its tender leaves as his king had won the war.

"துன்னருந் தானைத் தொடுகழலான் துப்பெதிர்ந்து
முன்னர் வணங்கார் முரண்முருங்க—மன்னரும்
நடலைத் தாங்கி பிகலவிந் தார் நீயுநின்
கோடெலா முன்னங் குழை."

(Puṛapporuḷ Veṇbā Mālai–243)

If the tree put forth new and tender leaves then the king was sure to succeed. On the other hand, if the tree began to fade and wither, then the king would get defeat only. The enemies of Nārmuḍichēral, a Chēra king, wanted to win a victory over him and so they consulted the Unnam tree in their place. The tree, instead of blooming, faded and dried, predicting defeat for them.

"புன்காலுன்னஞ் சாய." (Pathiṛṛupattu–40)

As Nalaṅkiḻḻi was called Putpagai in Puranānūru–68, so also Kapilar calls Selvakkaḍuṅkō-Vāḻiāthan as Unnattupagaivan in Pathiṛṛupattu–61, meaning thereby, that victory was always his whether the Unnam tree which had gold-coloured flowers and tiny leaves, signified success by blooming or defeat by withering. The term Unnattu-pagaivan may be taken also to mean that Vāliathan never favoured the superstitious idea of consulting the Unnam tree but straightaway entered into the battle-field, without observing any omens. Another construction put on this phrase by some scholars is that Vāḻiathan destroyed all Unnam trees he came across, so that they might not be of any use to his enemies.

" பொன்னி னன்ன பூவிற் சிறியிலை
புன்கா லுன்னத்துப் பகைவன்."

(Pathirrupattu–61)

Apart from this Unnam tree, if any big tree of luxurious growth and fine foliage, suddenly began to wither and drop its leaves, then the people were agitated and took it as a bad omen.

" பெருமரத், திலையி னெடுங்கோடு வற்றல் பற்றவும்."

(Puranānūru–41)

The withering of a branch or trunk of a sacred tree was enough to spread consternation throughout that locality. It was construed as a dismal portent that spelt some impending public disaster or calamity. This idea seems to have been a common one among the ancient peoples throughout the world. In Rome, for instance, as Plutarch says whenever a sacred tree appeared to a passer-by to be drooping, he set up a hue and cry, which was echoed by the people in the street and soon a crowd might be seen running helter–skelter from all sides with buckets of water, as if they were hastening to put out a fire.

Thus, we have seen a little about the Unnam, the prognosticator. Here, the foreshowing properties of the Unnam are attributed to the tree itself and no other spirit or deity is visualised or conjured as occupying that tree. Besides trees being worshipped as astrological oracles, they were also reverentially approached as judges, for the revelation of truth

**The Tree as the Judge**

in a given case or when the village elders were at their wit's end to decide whether the accused was the real culprit. It was generally believed that trees would not brook any sinner and especially, a perjurer to sit under their shade. The trees would immediately fade and wither; and if a perjurer seeks the shade of a tree, it would at once catch fire. This was the general attribute of any sacred tree. We get a reference to this in Kalitogai. There a lady-love was pining in separation. She could not restrain her feelings of loneliness. Whenever she heard the cooing of the kuyil (Indian Cuckoo), her heart began to burn like the tree under whose shade a perjurer was sitting. She melted into tears and complained thus:—

*" விரிகாஞ்சித் தாதாடி யிருங்குயில் விளிப்பவும்*
*பிரிவஞ்சாதவர் தீமை மறைப்பென்மன் மறைப்பவுங்*
*கரிபொய்த்தான் கீழிருந்த மரம்போலக் கவின்வாடி*
*எரிபொத்தி யென்னெஞ்சஞ் சுடுமாயி னெவன்செய்கோ."*

(Kalitogai–34)

[ When the kuyil, after feeding fat on the pollen–dust of the Kānchi blossoms (River portia) begins to call (in shady groves), I try to screen the cruelty of my husband, who has dared to depart from me; (but it is of no use) the grief burning within, singes my heart and leaves me bereft of the grace without, like a tree under whose shade a perjurer has stopped, catches fire. ]

The simile is very apt here since the heroine also tries to hide the truth of the guilt of the hero

like a person who perjures in public court. When the perjurer enters the shade of a tree, it bursts into flames, and the truth comes out. So also, when she tries to suppress the guilt, which was temporary desertion on the part of the hero, from knowing to the outside world, her heart like the tree, bursts into flames and proclaims the guilt of her lover to others. Others could glean the inner fire of her grief and its cause by seeing her withered beauty.

There is one other instance in Akanānūru where it is said that the help of a tree was sought to decide whether an accused person was really guilty or not. At Kaḻḻur, a fair and flourishing town, a villainous man was charged with the very serious crime of outraging the modesty of a young girl. The accused denied the charge by a solemn oath. No other valid evidence was available in the case. Under the peculiar circumstances of the case and in view of the blackness of the crime charged, the magistrates invoked the aid of the manḍram tree. The process was simple. The accused was made to stand under the verdure of the manḍram tree. A big crowd was watching the proceedings with rapt attention and tense feelings. Suddenly a branch just over the head of the accused, covered with fine foliage, burst into flames and shed ashes on his head. A cry of astonishment escaped from the lips of the onlookers. The guilt was known and the accursed mis-creant was found guilty.

"தொல்புகழ் நிறைந்த பல்பூங் கழனிக்
கரும்பமல் படப்பைப் பெரும்பெயர்க் கள்ளூர்த்
திருநுதற் குறுமகள் அணிநலம் வவ்விய
அறனி லாள னறியே னென்ற
திறனில் வெஞ்சூ ளறிகரி கடாஅய்
முறியார் பெருங்கிளை செறியப் பற்றி
நீறுதலைப் பெய்த ஞான்றை
வீறுசா லவையத் தார்ப்பினும் பெரிதே."

(Akanānūru–256).

We have already seen that every Manḍram had a sacred tree in ancient Tamilnād and that village courts were held under its shade, in the public place. So in some extraordinary cases the village headmen invoked the aid of the deity residing in the sacred tree to solve the problems. We can also learn from this that how the people detested the offence of perjury, that how even trees hated and suffered at the approach of the perjurer on whose head the wrath of heaven would visit at any cost.

**The Worship of the Kanthu**

We also come across a kindred form of worship in Tamil ḻiterature, vîz., the worship of the Kanthu, It is very well described in Paṭṭinappālai. The Chōḻa King, Karikāla the Great, employed the women captives brought from the lands he conquered, in sanctuaries where the Kanthu was worshipped. These sanctuaries were found in public places, the manḍrams, which also served as resting places for strangers. These captive women who were thus employed for holy services, cleansed

the shrines with cow-dung water, offered flowers to the Kanthu, the object of worship in the shrine and in the evening, after a sacred bath, tended the lamps in the shrine. The lamps were burning throughout the night without being extinguished. Hence these lights were called Nandā Viḷakku, This Kanthu was worshipped by a large number of people daily.

"கொண்டி மகளி ருண்டுறை மூழ்கி
யந்தி மாட்டிய நந்தா விளக்கின்
மலரணி மெழுக்க மேறிப் பலர்தொழ
வம்பலர் சேக்குங் கந்துடைப் பொதியில்."

(Paṭṭinappālai–246–249)

What was this Kanthu? From other references we are led to understand that it was a stump of wood, called also thari (தறி) or pillar of wood. We have seen in the earlier pages how sacred trees were grown in the mandṛams. A tree sacred or otherwise would live only for a certain number of years and then die. When a tree which was held sacred and worshipped, thus faded, withered and perished, it did not cease to be sacred and so the worship was carried on. The withered tree would wear away with the passing of time and there would come a stage when its bottom stem alone, in the form of a stump or post would be remaining. The devotees of the tree seemed to have taken particular care in preserving this last vestige of the tree-spirit by constructing a platform, around it and covering it with a roof to protect it from wind and rain. This remnant of the once flourishing

tree was likened to the post to which an elephant was ordinarily tied and was called Kanthu or pillar. Thus shrines for Kanthu cropped up throughout the country in course of time.

The ancients also believed that to keep a spirit dwelling in a stump of decayed tree, the usual offerings and worship should be carried on regularly and their cessation would make the spirit desert its original abode. Thus when wars came and a wholesale exodus had taken place in a town or village which had been overrun by the invaders, there would be nobody to offer pujas to those spirits which resided in the Kanthu and so those spirits also were believed to have deserted those places.

"களிகெழு கடவுட் கந்தம் கைவிட." (Purananūru–52)

"..........................................மாத்தாட் கந்தின்
சுரையிவர் பொதியி லங்குடிச் சீறூர்
நாட்பலி மறந்த நரைக்க ணிட்டிகைப்
புரிசை மூழ்கிய பொரியரை யாலத்து."

(Akan ānūru-287)

........................புதலிவர் பொதியிற்
கடவுட் போகிய கருந்தாட் கந்தத்து,."

(Akanānūru–307)

As this wooden remnant also was subject to decay and so threatened to disappear ultimately, stone pillars were employed in their stead and the worship was carried on, because the devotees thought that some object was necessary for the deity to pervade and persist to live at the spot and

confer benedictions on its worshippers. The people found in the stone pillar an imperishable residence for the tree-spirit. Thus gradually the worship of stone pillars became a common feature in the country. These stone posts that replaced the vanishing wooden post were worshipped and in many cases their original trees might have been forgotten. As these stone pillars stood alone at public, places where the cattle of the village used to graze-they formed convenient objects for the cows to rub their backs against. Hence these posts, were also called 'Ā-theeṇḍu-kuṟṟi' (ஆதீண்டுகுற்றி). These stone pillars were later worshipped as Kanthaḷi and Siva Linga.

Siva Linga is the glorious symbol of the Transcendence of Siva. Any attempt to connect that Glorious Form with phallic worship is but mischievous and misleading. The modern tendency to impute any such significance to Linga form of worship is to be strongly deprecated. It is indeed deplorable to find even some Saivites reading such a meaning into the Linga worship.

There is irrefutable evidence to show that the Linga worship came into being for the first time in the Tamil country only, and it dates back to several thousands of years. The original name for Siva Linga in Tamil was Kanthaḷi. Kanthaḷi has been described as the Supreme Divine Essence that transcends all form, shape, attachment and affections and is sustained by Itself. It is the Supreme Primal Deity of the Tamils, *viz*, Siva. Siva was

the Supreme God of gods whom the ancient Tamils worshipped. He is called Maluvāl Nediyōn in Maduraikānchi. So Siva was also called Kanthali, as transcending all forms. All will agree this is also the idea enshrined in the worship of the Siva Linga. Kanthali has been described as follows:

> "சார்பின்றிற் றோன்றாது தானருவா யெப்பொருட்குஞ்
> சார்பெனநின் றெஞ்ஞான்று மின்பந் தகைத்தரோ
> வாய்மொழியான் மெய்யான் மனத்தா னறிவிறந்த
> தூய்மையதா மைதீர் சுடர்."

> "Standing by Itself, propless and formless,
> For all things 'Tis the mainstay, Eternal Bliss,
> Transcending word, deed, thought, wisdom's [flight;
> 'Tis the Pure Stainless Light."

Diverse views have been put forward in explanation of this Kanthali. Many of them are fanciful and far-fetched. To my view it appears that a simpler and a more direct analysis of the compound word Kanthali would provide an easy and correct solution. Kanthali consists of two words, 'Kanthu' and 'Ali'. We know what a Kanthu is. It means the stump of a tree. The Tamils from time immemorial had been worshipping trees. When a sacred tree had fallen or dried up by withering, its devotees preserved the stump or the trunk of that tree and continued their worship. This wooden stump was called Kanthu and its worship Kanthudainilai. But this wooden stump also cannot be proof against the ravages of time and would soon wear out and vanish. When it thus disappeared in course of time, a stone post or

pillar was installed in its place and worshipped in memory of the former Kanthu. This stone was called Kanthaḷi, 'Aḷi' in Tamil means 'to destroy' and Kanthḷi means the successor or substitute that appears after the destruction of Kanthu, a suitable name indeed! This substituted stone post later took the form of Siva Linga and Kanthaḷi was the name given to it in ancient Tamil land. The broad base that forms the lower part of the Lingam is the pedestal on which the stone pillar or Kanthaḷi is made to stand. Later, in course of time, convenience and the mode of worship, consisting of several holy ablutions, necessitated a groove or canal to be dug round the circular base to receive the holy water and pass it on to the side of the receptacle specially built for the purpose in a part of the shrine. Artistic taste also was brought into play in beautifying the Siva Linga in an ornate style in certain cases. This is the only plausible interpretation of the origin of the cult of Linga worship; for even the remotest idea of phallism is revolting to the fine and cultured sensibilities of the Dravidian race.

**The Cocoanut Tree.**

The people in the Southern parts, especially in the Tirunelveli District, hold as sacred the co-coanut tree, the peepul tree (Arasamaram) and the neem tree. They call the co-coanut tree as Tennampiḷḷai (தென்னம்பிள்ளை) and protect it like a child. The removal of this tree is considered to be a sin and the superstition is that there will be an instant death in the family of the man who

causes the cocoanut tree to be cut. Even in Northern India the cocoanut is revered to this day and is esteemed to be one of the most sacred fruits. There it is called Sriphala or the fruit of Sri, the goddess of prosperity. Thousands and thousands of cocoanuts are offered every day and the number is increased during festive occasions in Hindu temples throughout India. The deity which takes a heavy toll of cocoanuts is Gaṇesh, in front of whom a large number of cocoanut are smashed every day. This is called Viḍalai or Soorai-iḍuthal. It is the general belief that the breaking of cocoanuts is the easiest and the surest way to propitiate this elephant-god and win his favour. But it must be noted that the worship of Gaṇēsh or Vināyaka was introduced into the Tamil country only in the sixth or seventh century and it has now become a very popular god.

When a cocoanut is broken before a god, it must break into two nice halves If it breaks at a tangent with its eyes injured or is found to be rotten inside, it is believed to be the foreshadowing of some serious trouble or mishap. This wrong breaking of the cocoanut will be the forerunner of some calamity to the devotee who offered that cocoanut. So some people deliberately avoid presenting any cocoanut to gods generally, because of their fear that it might break in the wrong way, thereby bringing untold miseries. From this we can imagine the gravity attached to the practice of culling out omens from the breaking of cocoanuts.

It will be useful to note here that the Wanika of Eastern Africa fancy that the cocoanut tree (as also every other tree) has its spirit; "the destruction of a cocoanut tree is regarded as equivalent to matricide, because that tree gives them life and nourishment, as a mother does her child."

**Trees and Navel-strings.**

In the extreme south of the Tamil land, the navel-strings of all new-born babes and also those of the calves are bundled up in straw or a basket and are used to be hung upon the branches of banian trees; usually this is done on those trees which are standing near a cemetry or cremation-ground. This is an age-long custom but the reason for doing so remains still obscure. This custom is also prevalent among the Tuhoe tribe of Maoris. They ascribe a specific potentiality to such trees that are associated with the navel-strings of definite mythical ancestors, as indeed the navel-strings of all children used to be hung upon them down to quite recent times. They believe that such trees have the power of making women fruitful. A barren woman had to embrace such a tree with her arms, and she received a male or female child according as she embraced the east or the west side of the tree.

**The Karpagam.**

The Karpaga is a mythological tree in the ethyreal world of Indra and is said to yield whatever one wished to have. This tree is closely connected with the worship of Indra which was prevalent in the Tamil

country just before and after the Christian era. This tree is not to be found anywhere on earth but literary evidence is not wanting to prove that huge temples were built for this tree and worshipped with great devotion. During the festival of Indra the temple of the Karpaga tree was gaily decorated and festooned with large flags.

" தங்கிய கொள்கைத் தருநிலைக் கோட்டத்து
மங்கல நெடுங்கொடி வானுற வெடுத்து."

(Silappadikāram–V–145–146)

The temple of the Karpaga tree was worshipped as the shrine of Indra. This tree was called the tree of the celestial beings or devas and Indra was supposed to be pleased to reside in that tree. People in distress worshipped this temple to have their grievances set right.

" அமரர் தருக் கோட்டம்."

(Silappadikāram–IX–9)

The temple of the Karpaga tree was always associated with the temple of Vajra (the mace of Indra), which was built in juxta-position, adjacent to the other. These two temples were built with high towers which looked prominent in a landscape view of the city of Puhār or Kāviripūmpaṭṭinam, the sea-port capital of the Chōḷa kingdom. The author of Maṇimēkalai metaphorically compares the huge edifices of those two shrines to the bulging bust of the damsel Puhār.

" தருநிலை வச்சிர மெனவிரு கோட்ட
மெதிரெதி ரோங்கிய கதிரிள வனமுலை."

(Maṇimēkalai–V–114–115

It will indeed kindle our curiosity to know how the Kaṟpaga tree was installed in temples to be worshipped while it is known that it was not of the mundane growth but was the special property of the Heaven. This can easily be answered by a study of the later day works. Vikrama Chōḻa (1118-1136) is said to have covered the roof of the Dancing Hall of Chidambaram, the shrine of Sri Naṭarāja, with gold and installed in the temple Kaṟpaga trees made of gold.

> " அம்பல நிறைந்த வற்புதக் கூத்தர் இன்பர்வாழ்
> வெழுந்தருளு தற்குத் திருத்தேர்க் கோயில்
> செம்பொன் மேய்ந்து பருதிரள் முத்தின் பசிய
> வடம் பரப்பி நிறைமணி மாளிகை நெடுந்திரு
> வீதி தன் திருவளர் பெயராற் செய்தமைத்
> தருளிப் பைம்பொற் குழித்த பரகல முதலாற்
> செம்பொற் கற்பகத் தொடு பரிச் சின்னமும்
> அளவிலாதன வொளி பெற வமைத்து.''

(South Indian Inscriptions, Vol. V, No. 458, page 177)

Apart from this inscriptional evidence, the son of Vikrama Chōḻa, Kulōtunga II (1133-1146,) is said to have installed golden trees of the Kaṟpaga in the Chidambaram temple.

> " அற்பக லாக வளர்ந்த சதகோடி
> கற்பக சாதி கதிர்கதுவ.........திகழ்வித்து."

(Kulōtunga Chōḻan Ulā-105-112)

The glittering Kaṟpaga image of burnishing gold was dazzling with super brilliance. Ṛājarāja Chōla II (1146-1162), son of Kulōtunga II, is also

credited with the grand deed of placing Kaṟpaga trees, made of gold in the temple of Naṭarāja at Chidambaram.

> " தில்லை வனங்கட வுள்செறி கற்பக
> வல்லி வனம்பெற வந்தவன் வாழியே."
>
> (Thakkayāgaparaṇi-804)

Sundara Māran, *alias*, Kūn Pāṇḍian of Madura, who became a Jain and later was reconverted by the Saiva boy-saint, Tirugñānasambandar, endowed the Siva temple at Madura with rich jewels and precious stones, together with Kaṟpaga trees.

> " சுந்தரன் றனைத்துதித்துச் சுந்தர மாறன்கோயில்
> வந்துமா பூசைசெய்து மவுலி மாணிக்கவாசி
> முந்துசின் காதனம்பூண் முத்துமேற்கட்டி பட்டங்
> கந்தமார் கவரிதிண்டேர் கற்பகத் தருவோடீந்தான்."
>
> (Tiruvālavāyuḍaiyār Tiruviḷaiyādaṟpurāṇam
> 37-Stanza-75)

From the above references we are led to conclude that, as no real trees of the Kaṟpaga specie are available on earth, images of them were installed in temples and worshipped in early days when the worship of Indra was popular in the country. Later, when the Indra worship became extinct, Kaṟpaga trees in gold were kept in Siva temples. Even to-day we can see artificial Kaṟpaga trees fixed on canopied car-like vehicles (வாகனம் or சப்பரம்), in which idols are carried in procession during festivals.

## SERPENT-WORSHIP

An account of the cult of tree worship will not be complete, without a hint on serpent-worship. The connection of serpent-worship with tree-worship may have originally arisen from the fact that many snakes like to establish themselves in the roots of trees, especially, in those of huge old ones. Serpents never fail to usurp possession of anthills which grow largely at the foot of huge trees. The ant-hills under sacred trees are not demolished and thus they become the convenient abode of deadly snakes, like the cobra. The offerings sprinkled at the foot of trees are eaten by these reptiles. This plausibly engenders the belief that gods in the shape of serpents reside under the trees and appropriate the offerings proffered to them. Demons were believed to be occupying both serpents and trees. It is significant to note that God Siva is Lord of demons, snakes and plants.

Serpent worship is diffused over the whole world, in countries so remote geographically as Africa and Peru, Fiji and Italy and India and Greece. It is so common and so continuous in human life that we find it everywhere. Religion itself originated with primitive man in fear, and rituals and sacrifices were resorted to as a mode of cajoling and pacifying malignant and vindictive supernatural beings. Ophiolatry also was born out of fear for the deadly venom of the snake. Innumerable lives are lost annually from snake-bite

in India alone, and this accounts for the widespread fear. So it has always been that men have everywhere looked with fear, religious awe and veneration these venomous vipers.

Throughout the length and breadth of India one can hardly fail to see Nāga images installed under trees, particularly the peepul tree (arasa maram) and worshipped. Ant-hill mounds are fostered in temples and adored. At Sankaranainār-koil, in the Tirunelveli District, there is a Siva temple. This is also known as Pāmbu-koil (Snake temple). There are ant-hills inside the temple and cobras are living there. Daily pujas are made to these snakes and worshippers offer milk. The ant-hill earth is believed to have medicinal properties. It is called Puṟṟu Maṉ or Puṟṟu Marundu. Innumerable devotees, take a vow to roll round the temple for the curing of any disease or the birth of a child. On the day of the Tapas festival in the month of Āḍi or on any other auspicious occasion they fulfil their vow by rolling and crawling round the temple serpent-fashion. They also take home with them some earth from the sacred serpent holes. This earth is believed to cure leprosy and sterility, if taken in. The Purāṇas say that here it was that God Siva showed to His consort, Gōmati Amman and to the two serpents Sanka and Padma, who were quarrelling as to the relative importance of Siva and Tirumāl, the unity of the two gods. It is said that king Ugra Pāṇḍiya discovered a Lingam there by the presence of a

cobra and then the present shrine was built by him. Even to-day one can see a bowl of milk being kept ever ready at the mouth of the serpent-hole inside the temple at Sankarankōil.

If any cobra enters a house in the Tirunelveli District, the inmates in dismay importune and address the cobra thus: "Sankara! Sankara! we pray you, please quietly walk out!"; and the cobra, which, in Tamil, is called Nalla Pāmbu (good snake), gently quits the premises. It is considered a sin to kill a cobra. But those who are free from this superstition, beat and kill it. Once killed, it is reverentially buried with milk offerings. Strange stories are current at Sankaran Kōil and the surrounding places of how the destroyers of cobras were visited by calamities as a sign of Divine wrath.

The cobra's visit to a house is construed as an ill-omen and the superstitious belief is that the residents of that house would have to vacate the house shortly. Cobras will haunt only desolate, ruined and forsaken buildings. There is a verse which says that the houses of those who perjure in law-courts, out of partiality, will crumble into ruins covered with erukku (calotropis gigantea) and other wild shrubs and thistles, where ghosts will frequent and cobras will reside.

*"வேதாளஞ் சேருமே வெள்ளெருக்குப் பூக்குமே*
*பாதாள மூலி படருமே—மூதேவி*
*சென்றிருந்து வாழ்வளே சேடன் குடிபுகுமே*
*மன்றோரஞ் சொன்னார் மனை."*

[The devils will haunt and the erukku blossom: pātāḷa mūli, the thorny shrub will spread: the goddess of misfortune, Mūdēvi, the elder sister of Lakshmi, will dwell and serpents will take their abode in the residing house of him who commits the sin of perjury in court.]

The hood of the cobra is said to bear the imprint of a Nāmam, Sangu (couch) and chakra (disc), the emblems of Thirumāl. Snake charmers tame this dreadful reptile with charms and mantrams and with the aid of some herbs. The holy ash or Thiruniṟu is believed to tame wild serpents. When the holy ashes are thrown at them, they will shrink their hoods and be assuaged of their fury.

> "கல்லெறிந் தன்ன கயவர்வா யின்னாச்சொல்
> எல்லாருங் காணப் பொறுத்துய்ப்ப—ரொல்லை
> யிடுநீற்றாற் பையவிந்த நாகம்போற் றத்தங்
> குடிமையான் வாதிக்கப் பட்டு." (Nāladiār–66)

The hooded snakes were believed to have a precious dazzling gem in their hood called Nāga Ratnam. These begemmed snakes were said to emit those luminous stones during nights to the ground and with the help of their brilliant radiation they would get enough light to hunt for their prey.

> "ஈருயிர்ப் பிணவின் வயவுப்பசி களைஇய
> விருங்களி றட்ட பெருஞ்சின வுழுவை
> நாம நல்லராக் கதிர்பட வுமிழ்ந்த
> மேய்மணி விளக்கிற் புலர வீர்க்கும்
> வாள்நடந் தன்ன வழக்கருங் கவலை."
>
> (Akanānūru–72)

[To feed the hungry tigress that is big with child, the ferocious tiger will kill the elephant and drag it along the route that is lit with the gem which the deadly cobra had emitted out to get enough light to hunt for prey in the darkness of the night.]

There are numerous allusions to show that the snakes were dreadfully afraid of thunderbolts and when heavens fulminate, they crouch deep in their holes. Thunder would weaken the cobras and bring their gems out of their hoods. These ejected stones would illumine the forest at night with a stream of light.

"உருமுச்சிவர்ந் தெறிந்த வுரனழி பாம்பின்
திருமணி விளக்கிற் பெறுகுவை
இருள்மென் கூந்தல் ஏமுறு துயிலே."

(Akanānūru-92)

[You can have the company of the girl of the dark tresses in the light of the gem dropped by the snake that is beaten by the furious thunder bolts.]

Literary evidence with regard to the practice of ophiolatry in ancient Tamil land is few and far between. But evidence is not altogether wanting. On a thrashing-floor in the midst of fields there was a Murdah or marutham tree at the foot of which snakes were living. Offerings were presented by the peasants under the tree to gratify the gods dwelling in the tree and the serpents underneath.

"பாம்புறை மருதின் ஓங்குசினை நீழல்
பலிபெறு வியன்களம் மலிய வேற்றி.?"

(Perumpāṇāṟṟupadai-232-233)

One mendicant was describing the way through which a band of musicians had to pass through a mountain, to the capital city of king Nannan. He warned them of a particular spot which was full of caves and crevices where snakes would be concealed. He specially asked the ladies in the group to lift their hands in prayer when they would reach that spot and worship the snakes so that they might not do any harm, as they would be pleased with their prayer. The pedestrians were also asked to beat their sticks against trees and make noise to make the snakes go out of the way. They were also enjoined to circumambulate the spot and immediately leave the place.

“ முரம்புகண் ணுடைந்த பரலவற் போழ்விற்
கரந்துபாம் பொடுங்கும் பயம்புமா றுளவே
குறிக்கொண்டு மரங்கொட்டி நோக்கிச்
செறிதொடி விறலியர் கைதொழூஉப் பழிச்ச
வறிதுநெறி யொரீஇ வலஞ்செயாக் கழிமின்.”

(Malaipaḍukaḍām-198-202)

These lines clearly prove that snakes were worshipped out of fear.

Snake worship in South India was purely of Dravidian origin ; so much so the aboriginal tribes were called Nāgas or Serpent-worshippers ;but it is a wonder that no direct reference is made to this custom in old literature. This cult is alien to the Brahminical religion. But a close association has been achieved between the Vedic religion and the primitive snake worship. Siva wears the serpents all over His body and Vishṇu rests on a serpentine couch. Rev. F. Goodwill says. “The great god Siva, the god of supreme power in South India, is

often represented as an ascetic with serpents twining themselves about his hair and neck and in this character resorting to and dwelling chiefly in cemetries. Though the worship of the serpent is perhaps less obviously connected with his name than with that of Vishṇu, yet it seems to me that this deity makes the serpent more a part of himself and identifies it more with his character. And this is significant when it is remembered that Siva is generally believed by scholars to be largely the creation in Hinduism of the indigenous religion of the country acting upon the religious consciousness of the Aryan conquerors." The God Siva at Tiruvārūr is called Puṟṟiḍamkoṇḍār (புற்றிடங்கொண்டார்). A Siva Linga was discovered inside a mound with serpent-holes at Tiruvārūr and then the present temple was built over that mound. That mound or puṟṟu is still preserved within the temple.

There is an allusion to the munificence of Āyi, the ruler of the Pothiyil hills. He obtained from a snake a cloth of glittering blue colour and with fervid devotion presented it to the God of the Banian Tree, Siva. Excepting this bald statement no other evidence is forth-coming regarding this fact but it is noteworthy that the gift of a snake was presented to a Tree-god, Siva.

" *நிழல்திகழ், நீல நாகம் நல்கிய கலிங்கம்*
*ஆலமர் செல்வற் கமர்ந்தனன் கொடுத்த...ஆய்,*"
(Sirupāṇāṟṟupaḍai 95-99)

Garuḍa, a mythical bird and the vehicle of Vishṇu, is said to be the deadly enemy of the serpent race. Garuḍa is likened to the

common white-headed kite, sacred to Vishṇu (Haliastur indus.) Its very shadow is death to any snake. In the practical world it becomes possible for the magician to cure a patient of snake-bite, by intensely contemplating on Garuḍa. The magician thinks, "I am Garuḍa." Thus the magician, by the incantation of the Garuḍa mantra, acquires the virtues of Garuḍa in respect of immunity from snake-bites. By thus contemplating he attains the state of Garuḍa and its qualities, and the poison is removed. This is called the practice of Garuḍōhambhāvana. Tirumūlar alludes to this in Tirumantram.

"கருட னுருவங் கருது மளவிற்
பருவிடந் தீர்ந்து பயங்கெடும்."

[ As the Garuḍa's form in mind is built
Fast fades the venom with its deadly result..]

**Conclusion**

We have tried to make an exhaustive study of all the available literary evidence bearing on the subject of tree and serpent worship as was obtaining in Tamil Nāḍ for the past two or three melleniums. One will not fail to perceive the natural course which the development of religious thought has taken, gliding through the ages from one stage to another with precise logical sequence. There are some missing links, no doubt, which confound and mystify certain points. There are many other sources to be explored before we arrive at correct findings on the subject. The present study is hoped to furnish some of those missing links and form the basis for further research on the subject.